

THE HIDDEN CONVERSION:
DIVINE HOSPITALITY AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHP

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KEVIN ALLEN HALL
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Dedicated
to
Josie Hall

*I have written about divine hospitality.
You have lived it out.
Thank you for showing me the greater thing.*

Our perception enables our reception.

- Michele Hershberger

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There is an old saying that goes, “When you see a turtle on top of a fence post you know it didn’t get there by itself.” I’m that turtle. You might see a “Dr.” in front of my name some day but I alone didn’t put it there, a whole bunch of other folks helped. First and foremost, this paper was written in dedication to God in whom I am most grateful. All that I have and have experienced that is good is because of His grace. I am also appreciative of my teachers both past and present who have invested their time, energy and wisdom into my life. I’m especially indebted to Drs. David Currie, Robert Coleman and my supervisor, Tim Beougher who provided a learning environment where students were both challenged and valued. Dr. Beougher’s guidance saved me from several rabbit trails that I might have merrily run down only to climb out of them scratched up and scratching my head.

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ABSTRACT

The practice of hospitality is at the heart of the Christian faith. Yet, despite its central location in the Bible's life and praxis, it remains in many churches undervalued or outright ignored as a means of Christian discipleship. This dissertation is an exploration of how the ancient biblical prescription and praxis of hospitality forms authentic Christian formation in the local church and in the life of the believer. My thesis is that by exploring the implications of biblical hospitality and centering them within the discipleship process, perspectives toward strangers will be changed and actions will be more welcoming of others.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

*Hospitality is, or it should be,
at the center of Christian discipleship,
because hospitality is at the center of the gospel.*

Christine Pohl¹

Introduction

When Jesus converted the water into wine at a wedding in Cana two conversions took place (John 2:1-11). The first conversion, water miraculously changing into wine, captures readers' attention and draws the most ink. Scholars and preachers love discussing the possible meaning behind the first of Jesus' miracles and it remains center stage of the drama. But there is another important detail of the story, which few see, and yet it maintains a critical place in the center of the biblical story at large. It is the second conversion: Jesus turns from guest to host at the wedding. This conversion is at the heart of the gospel and God's mission on earth. Yet, it remains hidden. We often times don't see it because we don't see or appreciate the importance of hospitality in the pages of the Bible. Whether it is found in Genesis with God's hospitable act of creating and inviting humanity into this universe or the whether it is found in Revelation in the apocalyptic images of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, divine hospitality is front and center in what it means to be truly human and a disciple of Jesus Christ.

¹Christine Pohl, "Hospitality Proper – Truth and Errors" (Lecture, The Francis Schaeffer Lecture Series. Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. Spring 2005).
<http://www.covenantseminary.edu/resources/lecture-series/the-francis-schaeffer-lecture-series-2005-spring-making-room-the-mystery-riches-and-challenge-of-christian-hospitality/> (Accessed December 10, 2012).

Commenting on the Road to Emmaus story in Luke 24:13-25, Jean-Luc Marion notes that the two disciples recognize Jesus only after he breaks bread in their home. Jesus again converts from guest to host. Marion states that the disciples' failure to recognize Jesus while walking was not based on physical concealment or insufficient evidence of the resurrection, but their blindness was based on a lack of imagination:

They do not recognize him because they cannot even imagine that this is really him...They see nothing – in the sense that one sees nothing in a game of chess if one does not know how to play; they hear nothing – in the sense that one hears nothing (except noise) in a conversation if one does not know the language in which it is being conducted.²

Statement of the Problem

Marion captures what I believe to be wanting in our present discipleship models; that is, the imagination to see how the teaching and practice of hospitality relates to the discipleship process. In my discussions with my fellow Christians, it is evident that many Christians do not recognize or imagine, borrowing Marion's terms, themselves as guests or hosts in the Kingdom of God. We do not see or hear the gospel's hospitable message or see ourselves as hosts and the stranger before us as our guest because we do not know the 'game' being played or the 'language' being spoken. And when we fail to see ourselves as guests and hosts of the Kingdom of God, we fail in becoming fully transformed into the image of God, which is the goal of every disciple. Moreover, our role in participating in The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) is dramatically stunted. We have simply missed reading the Scriptures well, thoughtless to the themes and structures of hospitality found therein. Christine Pohl said, "Oftentimes people

² Jean-Luc Marion, "They Recognized Him, and He Became Invisible to Them," *Modern Theology* 18, no. 2 (April 2002), 145.

overlook the moral and theological significance of hospitality, but a life of hospitality is basic to what it means to be Jesus' disciples.”³

Imagining biblical hospitality requires both an understanding and practice of what it means to embrace the guest-host image of God as revealed in Scripture. This image serves as a lens by which we think about our faith and bring clarity to a deeper understanding of the Gospel, and it is therefore helpful in understanding ourselves as guests and hosts of God’s mission on earth.

Hypothesis

The purpose of this project is to bring the ancient understanding of God’s hospitality into our present discipleship process in order to change how we see ourselves and how we see the stranger in our midst; therefore, creating space in our churches, homes, schools, and the marketplace for the stranger. With a changed perception and enlarged space for the stranger, disciples will assist in the outreach and discipleship goals of the local church and ultimately allow God more space to continually convert us into his hospitable image. This project then focuses on the question: How can a fuller understanding of Divine hospitality promote Christian formation at New Life Assembly?

I am promoting a reading and teaching of Scripture where hospitality in the biblical text is highlighted and taught in a local discipleship process. By doing so, God’s hospitality as depicted in Scriptures will serve as an agent of Christian formation in the disciple. Changing Christian’s perspective towards hospitality begins with an introduction to how hospitality fits within the grand biblical narrative and this is a matter of hermeneutics.

³Pohl 2005.

The origin of the Greek word for hermeneutic (*hermeneuō*), means to interpret translate or explain. For Bible study, hermeneutics concerns the way one properly understands meaning in the Bible for one's life and practice. It faithfully seeks to take the author's original meaning and intent and apply it to today's world. It is the framework that interprets a given story or text, or the methods that are used in that science. Bernard Ramm describes the process of understanding what the biblical revelation means and how that revelation bears on our lives this way: "Hermeneutics is the science and art of biblical interpretation. It is a science because it is guided by rules within a system; and it is an art because the application of the rules is by skill, and not by mechanical imitation. As such it forms one of the most important members of the theological sciences."⁴

Hermeneutics allows for a guided and artful way of understanding the biblical story in such a way as to change how we live in the present. It is not just a way of understanding Scripture in the author's original setting, as critical as this first step is, but rather, how that message comes home to the reader or hearer. In other words, it is not enough how we understand Jesus' parable on the Sheep and Goats (Matt. 25:31-46), where we learn about the Kingdom value of treating the stranger in our midst, but the parable is only fully understood existentially by applying it to our lives.⁵ There is a need for both levels of interpretation – that is, both the author's original intent and the subsequent application to the reader and their context – but without the former historical understanding application to one's contemporary setting lacks an 'anchor' as F.F. Bruce

⁴ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1970), 1.

⁵ F. F. Bruce, "Hermeneutics," in *New Bible Dictionary*, eds., I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 467.

suggests.⁶ Hermeneutics helps us understand and value the role of hospitality in God's grand narrative.

For this project, the purpose of hermeneutics is to revisit and reestablish an ancient understanding of the biblical narrative through the biblical world of Divine hospitality and then apply that understanding to our present day experience. Hermes, whose name is rooted in the word hermeneutics, was a Greek god and son of Zeus. He was a messenger of the gods and the god of eloquent speech. While the Apostle Paul was ministering at Lystra the crowd acclaimed that Paul was Hermes, a messenger of the gods, because of his eloquent role as chief speaker. They thought that Paul was a god visiting them in bodily form (Acts 14:11,12).

This is the goal of teaching Divine hospitality as a framework for discipleship to a group of disciples. Once a person better understands the message of Divine hospitality and its central role in the mission of God, he or she will better reflect God's image in this world and participate in our own hospitable opportunities. And when people see their welcome and hear their message, like Paul in Lystra, they might sense both God's presence and welcome as well. This is discipleship, when life practices involve both a deeper knowledge of God and a life of imitating Him. But it begins with understanding the Bible's teaching and allowing that teaching to change our perspective towards ourselves and towards the stranger. Hospitality is a foundational means to that end. Loving the stranger in our midst by receiving them is both a reflection of God and a response to what he has already done for us. Reinhard Hütter succinctly states, "The Practice of [Church] hospitality is, therefore, both a reflection and extension of God's

⁶ Bruce, 467.

own hospitality - God's sharing of love of the triune life with those who are dust.”⁷

Hospitality is God's missional bridge that extends God's love allowing for Divine and human connection.

The Need for the Study:

Bridges serve to get someone from one side to another. They connect people with loved ones, acquaintances and strangers. They bring people together who have different values, preferences, languages, cultures, and worldviews. These bridges, if neglected, become unsafe for passage and avoided because of their instability. Without bridges people are separated from one another, polarized from want of connection. The bridges between different Christian groups and between Christians and those not yet convinced of the Lordship of Jesus Christ are maintained and strengthened by embracing an ancient form of hospitality found in the Bible. And based on the various data and my own observations as a pastor of New Life Assembly, there is a need to initiate and implement a discipleship process that embraces Divine hospitality as a framework for discipleship. This serves to bridge the Christian to the stranger, whether that stranger is in the marketplace or sitting next to her during a Sunday morning service. A focus on hospitality in Scripture will provide a strong bridge between the Christian and an increasingly polarized and spiritually ambivalent American society.

The American Church's Need for Hospitality

The Church in the United States is dog paddling against a swift current. Any cursory review of the health of the American church today reveals the need for a fresh and determined engagement with Christian discipleship. Gary McIntosh said that

⁷ Reinhard Hüttner, “Hospitality and Truth: The Disclosure of Practices in Worship and Doctrine,” in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds., Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 219.

“Roughly three-fourths of established churches in North America are either declining or on a long-term plateau. Such churches are ineffective at making disciples – at least new disciples – and function with a lack of fruitfulness and hope.”⁸ Charles Van Engen describes the health crisis of most older Protestant denominations as one of declining congregations, with less than half of the church attendance of their golden years, with aging congregants located in transitional neighborhoods which the church members are more interested in the survival of their congregation than they are the new people who have moved into the surrounding neighborhood.⁹ On a national level the statistics are a shot across the church’s bow.

According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, those Americans who even considered themselves Christian in any sense of the word dropped from 90.9% of the population in 1970 to 80.1% in 2010. Moreover, that number is projected to drop to 78.1% by 2020.¹⁰ If we widen the circle further we discover that one out of every five non-Christians in North America does not “personally know” one Christian. That’s equivalent to the metropolitan area of Los Angeles, California not knowing a single disciple of Christ.¹¹ According to Abby Stocker , looking worldwide, the numbers increase to four out of five non-Christians who do not “personally know” one individual Christian. Jeff Christopherson paints a bleak picture of self-imposed segregation of the American Christian: “We hide in our own evangelical ghetto. We send our kids to

⁸ Gary McIntosh, *There’s Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 20

⁹ Charles Van Engen, “Growing and Multiplying Churches in the USA” (Lecture, Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, CA, January 14, 2009).

¹⁰ Todd Johnson, Dir., “Christianity in its Global Context, 1970-2020: Society, Religion, and Mission.” June 2013. Center for the Study of Global Christianity - Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, on-line report. www.globalchristianity.org/globealcontext. pg. 62.pdf. (accessed: February 12, 2013). The Canadian numbers are even more remarkable: 94.5% in 1970 dropped to 69.4% in 2010.

¹¹ Johnson, 62.

Christian schools, we go to churches that would only be welcoming to people that think like us.”¹² According to Stocker, she attributes to missiologist Todd Johnson this summary of the church’s failure to fulfill its mission, America is suffering from a “serious deficit of hospitality. It’s contributing to isolated enclaves of believers and non-believers.”¹³ But the enclaves are not solely based on those who have faith and those who do not. It is also based on how a people of faith affiliate with one another.

According to Robert Putnam and David Campbell (P & C), there are three historical seismic shocks that have shaken the foundation of American religious culture.¹⁴ The first major quake came in the 1960’s counter-culture movement where perceived moral underpinnings were loosened. The two following aftershocks were responses to this loosening of religious and moral institutions. The first backlash was the evangelical movement that tied itself to political power in the 1970’s and 80’s, such as, the Moral Majority. The second backlash came in the 1990’s and 2000’s when the next generation didn’t share their parents’ conservative views, especially when it was perceived that conservative faith was equated with conservative politics.

Political and religious polarization has permeated the American church. The religious culture wars have impacted, especially younger people, how one chooses a church; people lean towards churches, not based on doctrinal views but rather upon political ones.¹⁵ The result is that liberal, secular, and conservative poles are strengthened and the moderate religious middle weakened. P & C summarize, “Religious

¹² Abby Stocker, “The Craziest Statistic You’ll Read About North American Missions,” *Christianity Today*, (August, 18th, 2013). <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/august-web-only/non-christians-who-dont-know-christians.html> (Accessed January 12, 2014).

¹³ Stocker 2013.

¹⁴ Robert D. Putnam, and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 132.

¹⁵ Putnam and Schuster, 132.

polarization has increasingly aligned Americans' religious affiliations with their political inclinations.”¹⁶ Even within the church many remain separated for political rather than biblical reasons. As a result, people began to distance themselves from organized religion and other institutions.

According to P & C, American religion is more associated with partisan politics in a way that it was not fifty years ago. This polarization has given rise to the ‘nones’ (no religious attendance or affiliation), most of which have faith in God and believe in life after death, but they do not affiliate with any particular religion.¹⁷ The number of Americans who do not identify with any religion continues to grow at a rapid pace. One out of five of Americans, and one out of three adults less than thirty years of age, is religiously unaffiliated.¹⁸ The U.S. adult ‘nones’ have increased from just over 15% to just under 20% in the last five years, included in their numbers are 13 million self-described atheists and agnostics (nearly 6% of the U.S. public).¹⁹

But with this social and religious polarization comes great opportunity. Here is P & C’s conclusion that helps us understand the opportunities for Christian hospitality: the same fluidity of American religion that help birth division also gives life to a new religious cross pollination. While some may be alarmed by the spiritual ambiguity that potentially emerges from this reality, there is an opening here. While Christians are tending to segregate among political lines, the majority of Americans are becoming more comfortable with people who are different from them. The climate for bridge repairing is perhaps easier today than in the past. Dan Kimball’s echoes this point in *The Emerging*

¹⁶ Putnam and Schuster, 133.

¹⁷ Putnam and Schuster, 122-127.

¹⁸ Pew Research: *Numbers, Facts and Trends Shaping Your World, Religion and Public Life Project*. pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/, 2012. (Accessed January 5, 2014).

¹⁹ Pew Research 2012.

Church, where he emphasizes that evangelism is less of an invitation to an event and more of an invitation to enter into a community.²⁰

The Assemblies of God's Need for Hospitality

The call for hospitality to be center to our discipleship process needs to be heard within my own Assemblies of God (AG) fellowship, where numerically, the movement within the United States has hit a plateau.²¹ Nationally, the average AG Sunday morning worship service attendance grew by .04% and despite the good news that the number of new church plants exceeded dying churches and that there was a net increase of 218 new churches in 2012, it remains that every 5 days 3 AG churches close their doors.²² In the Northwest Region of the country where I pastor (State of Washington and Northern Idaho), despite the 7,663 conversions recorded by participating churches in 2012, 33 churches reported not a single spiritual conversion in the church. Of those 33 churches, 11 averaged more than 200 attendees on Sunday mornings and one church averaging 673 attendees per Sunday service; yet, they did not record one conversion in a year's time. In total, of all churches reporting there was a -3.7% decrease in the number of conversions in 2012 from the previous year.²³ Moreover, within the Northwest Region, 70% of churches over 400 in average attendance, 55% of churches between 75-399 in average

²⁰ Dan Kimbell, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 204.

²¹ The Assemblies of God, *Statistics of the Assemblies of God*, ag.org/top>About/statistics/index.cfm. (Accessed January 2, 2014).

²² Mel Ming, *2012 Annual Church Ministries Report: Northwest Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God – Executive Summary*, 2012. 10-36. Statistics provided by the Assemblies of God records of Annual Church Ministry Reports (ACMR) through Assembly of God General Secretary's Office. 6/17/13. ag.org/top>About/statistics/index.cfm (Accessed January 2, 2014). Nationally, the average Sunday morning worship service attendance grew by 0.4%, and even though there has been a 14% growth in adherents from 1978 to 2012, and the fellowship is still planting more churches than are being closed, a net increase of 218 new churches, it remains that 3 churches are closing every 5 days. Moreover, from those churches that reported, there was a -3.7% decrease in the number of conversions in 2012 from 2011.

²³ Mel Ming, *2012 Annual Church Ministries Report: Northwest Ministry Network of the Assemblies of God – Executive Summary*, 2012. 10-36.

²³ Ming, 10-66.

attendance, and 49% of those 74 and under in average attendance, declined in average attendance in 2012.²⁴ The need for a fresh discipleship based on hospitality is not just needed in smaller churches or in different parts of the state, it is needed across the demographic map.

Kimball challenges many churches' evangelistic strategy, suggesting that our strategy needs to be simplified, we need to simply be what the church was intended to be, a community of a new humanity where the main focus lies not on events but on the community. "Rather than Christians creating a strange subculture that alienates non-Christians, believers need to seriously include those who aren't Christians into their lives, their social outings, and their irregular prayers. We need to establish community in deep ways to build trust. We need to move our strategy to outside the church walls again."²⁵ Ultimately, of all the questions surrounding how to do the mission of God in our local ministry setting boils down to asking the right question, in the words of Mortimer Arias, "How hospitable are our churches? This amounts to asking, how evangelistic are they?"²⁶

The Need for the Study - Summary

The church can be a place where strangers can become friends if it is more hospitable to those different from us. Connections matter. Our society values social networking that has a more positive approach to others of different worldviews than our own. This openness provides opportunity for bonding and bridge building to take place. Again, Putnam and Campbell add, "Having more friends within a congregation means a lower likelihood of switching to a new one...and the longer you remain in a congregation

²⁴ Ming, 6.

²⁵ Kimball, 204.

²⁶ Mortimer Arias, "Centripetal Mission or Evangelization by Hospitality," *Missionary: An International Review*, 10, no. 1, (January, 1982), 72.

the less likely you are to leave it.”²⁷ Once in the door, guests must find ways to connect with one another if they are going to come back. Social contact and familiarity help produce religious tolerance and serve as a bridge to spiritual formation. Divine hospitality as a framework for discipleship provides a fresh look at an ancient and effective way of fulfilling the Great Commission. It provides a new language and vision to reaching those within our spheres of influence.

What I am proposing is not something new but rather revisiting and reclaiming something old: a discipleship emphasis with hospitality at its center. Throughout the Bible the themes and structures of hospitality are woven throughout the different stories and genres. We miss it because today we do not weigh hospitality’s moral and theological importance in the same manner than they did in antiquity. But a life of hospitality is central to what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

I offer two significant reasons why we should emphasize hospitality in our discipleship training. The first is that hospitality provides us with a lens through which we can think about our faith journey. It’s a central theme running through the Bible and a practice by which the early church engaged and wrote. Reflecting on God’s gracious hospitality and culminating in the giving of His Son, Jesus Christ, we discover how to live in this world, making room for others, compelled by the invitation of God in our lives. This gives us a new and ancient perspective on what it means to be a disciple.

Secondly, it speaks a language that has great potential to be heard in our present polarizing and post-modern culture where community trumps reasoned apologetics.²⁸ In

²⁷ Arias, 174.

²⁸ Kimball, 201. Kimball argues that the church is beginning to shift from an event driven, speaker/listener form of proclamation of the Good News to a more community driven approach that speaks more louder and

this manner, hospitality becomes both a spiritual discipline and an evangelistic process that supports The Great Commission. Darrell Gruder describes the need for the church to become an inviting community:

Evangelism would move from an act of recruiting or co-opting those outside the church to an invitation of companionship...To those invited, the church would offer itself to assist their entrance into the reign of God and to travel with them as co-pilgrims. Here lies a path for the renewal of the heart of the church and its evangelism.²⁹

The mission of God does not avoid encountering truth but does so by embodying truth prior to sharing it. Robert Webber, in his book, *Ancient Future Faith*, writes, “The most significant apologetic that Christians will be able to offer in the twenty-first century, is the quality of life and welcome within the church.”³⁰ Today, most people, especially, most youth, are not impressed with coming to truth through reasoned arguments, especially winning religiously dogmatic ones. But one can win another’s attention and respect by first treating them as someone to be loved rather than an object to be won. A community that embodies the experience of the Kingdom will draw people to itself.

Webber adds:

The church is the primary presence of God’s activity in this world. As we pay attention to what it means to be the church we create an alternative community to the society of the world. This new community, the embodied experience of God’s kingdom, will draw people into itself and nurture them in the faith. In this sense, the church, and its life in the world, will become the new apologetic. People come to faith, not because they see the logic of the argument, but because they have experienced a welcoming God in a hospitable and loving community.³¹

clearer to a post-modern audience. Evangelism is more relational, done by the community of faith, enters into dialogue and uses the church as a primary apologetic.

²⁹ Darrell Gruder, ed., *The Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 26.

³⁰ Robert E. Webber, *Ancient Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 71.

³¹ Webber, 71.

The Setting for the Study

Demographic Realities

New Life Assembly is located in the Kittitas Valley east of the Cascade Mountains. Kittitas County is a sparsely populated consisting largely of a ranching and farming communities. The county seat is Ellensburg (pop. 17,000) which hosts one of America's premier rodeos. A significant section of the populous in Ellensburg consists of Central Washington University with its 11,000 student enrollment.

The driving distance from Ellensburg to downtown Seattle is under 90 minutes. This makes it possible for people to live in Ellensburg and work in Seattle. Economically it is a stagnant environment. Most of the job opportunities are related to the support services for university and young graduates usually leave the area in search of better job possibilities. Stir these ingredients together and you have an eclectic community. It is not unusual to see cowboys and green haired youth walking down the sidewalk together. There are urban professionals mixed with those who dropped out of school. Politically, it is mostly conservative, but with the University, it is not without a liberal voice and influence. New Life Assembly of God is located in Kittitas which is 6 miles east of Ellensburg. Both towns reside in the same valley.

According to a June 12th, 2013, *FullInsite Report* requested by the Northwest Ministry Network on behalf of New Life Assembly, within a twenty mile radius of the church lies a diverse society.³² The median age is 36.3 years of age per person. There are 36,012 people living within a twenty mile radius of the church.

³² MissionSite, *FullInsite Report* prepared for the Northwest Ministry Network, June 12th, 2013, 6. <http://www.churchinsite.com/full.html> (Accessed July 12, 2013).

The projected population trends are leaning towards increased diversity. *FullInsite* projects significant changes in the area's population, household dynamics, and poverty levels. In the next ten years there is projected to be a 9.63% increase of 7,183 people moving into the valley for a total of 43,195 people. In the next five years there will be a 12% increase in family households growing from 7,845 in 2012 to 8,853 families in 2017. 11.60% of the families live below the poverty level, which is higher than the state average (9.10%). Racially the surrounding area is 84% Caucasian, 8.2% Hispanic, and 3.4% Asian followed by other cultural groups. By 2015 it is projected that the Hispanic and Asian groups will be the only groups to experience population increases. Our social mosaic type has been identified as a major university town set within an industrious country living environment consisting of unattached multi-cultural people groups. What are less likely to change are the racial and ethnic diversity, average family income, and level of religiosity, the last of which is projected to remain 'somewhat low.'³³

Although many who live in the valley year around would simply describe the Kittitas Valley as a two lifestyle society – a conservative farming community and a progressive university transient population – the valley is a mosaic with no less than fifteen distinct life style groups.³⁴ They range from *Golden Year Guardians* (town elders) to *Suburban Style* (sports utility families) to *Singles and Starters* (digital dependents) to *Family Union* (stockcars and state parks), and beyond. When the social mosaic is unpacked it reveals a complex and potentially polarizing valley consisting of many sub-communities within a larger community.

³³ MissionSite, 2.

³⁴ MissionSite, 24.

The two largest lifestyle groups are *Colleges and Cafes* (singles and starters – 16.38%), and *Unspoiled Splendor* (thriving boomers – 14.09%). The *College and Cafes* are people thirty-five years or under who live around university towns. They are predominately white, with an above average representation of Asians. They have a college degree, tend to have lower income households, usually renters, and you find them often working in entry-level jobs. But their lifestyle is wide-ranging. You'll find them watching foreign films, going to classical music concerts and then go target shooting. Fast food and supermarket takeout are common fare. Politically, their general view is liberal, but there are not ideologues. They may share their views but few volunteer for a good cause and only half of them would even think of joining a demonstration. Only half are registered to vote and about one in seven belong to a fringe political party. They value authenticity and are not into fashion. Spiritually and religious issues play only a cursorily role in their lives.

Unspoiled Splendor are people who live in farming communities and about a third still make their living in agriculture. Nine out of ten households are between the ages of fifty-one and sixty-five. These are the white, baby boomers who like living in remote areas and working hard. They like doing things outdoors like fishing, hunting and riding horses. They are financially conservative and usually have a nest egg for their retirement. At heart they are traditionalists and social conservatives, politically to the right, and usually align themselves with the Republican Party. They love being in nature but are not overly concerned with environmental issues. They enjoy the peace and quiet that comes with secluded communities. They prefer to cook at home rather than going out to eat. They are active in a variety of causes whether they are political, religious or health.

They consider themselves religious and they constitute a higher than average concentration of people of faith within their sub-group.

The demographics suggest the potential for polarization between the various lifestyle groups. For example the *College and Cafes* and *Unspoiled Splendors* are not aligned on many levels. They are on different age levels, preferences for entertainment and politics, and how they value spirituality as it pertains to their everyday life dramatically varies. Jean Vanier, found of the L'Arche communities, writes that “welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive.”³⁵ If the church fails to be welcoming or if the demographics of the surrounding area trump the hospitality of God in the local church whereby the church fails to embody the gospel, then that congregation is “dying spiritually;”³⁶ and so are all within the twenty-mile radius.

Ministerial Setting

New Life Assembly of God is fairly well aligned with the demographics of the valley. Racially, we are predominately white with approximately 10% of our membership consisting of various ethnic groups. Politically it is predominately conservative amongst those who live and farm in the valley and predominately liberal amongst those who are connected to the Central Washington University. In the last eight years New Life Assembly (NLA) has grown from 85 to 224 in average Sunday morning worship attendance. However, from 2011-2013, there has been little change in the average attendance. According to our records we average about 11 conversions to Christ per year, most of those children.

New Life Assembly is well known for being a ‘friendly’ church but I’m not

³⁵ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989), 267.

³⁶ Vanier, 267.

convinced that we are a place where people can make friends. That is, we tend to greet the *stranger* warmly but do not provide them the deeper, more biblical aspects of hospitality that reflects God's gracious and generous hospitality to this world. Our relationships tend to gravitate toward social enclaves based on personal preferences or political values keeping potential friends as strangers. Unfortunately, based on my own observations, Robert Putnam and David Campbell's depiction of the American church as a place where religious and political lines are difficult to distinguish has periodically described New Life Assembly as well.³⁷

NLA's mission statement is "New Life Assembly exists to make and send fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ." This comes directly out of Jesus Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Our philosophy of ministry is that healthy churches make healthy followers of Christ. So when we ask ourselves questions of outreach effectiveness we take a holistic view of discipleship. We are aware of the encroaching influence of what Bill Hull calls 'non-discipleship Christianity' where people religiously consume what the church has to offer without any change in their appetite for God.³⁸

Our outreach philosophy is to work with God's process of disciples making disciples. A faulty process will lead to faulty results. Our focus is therefore both on the spiritual condition of church members and those outside of the church. Our current outreach effort begins with the development of a discipleship pathway within the church. We draw our model from the first description of the church after Pentecost in Acts 2: 42-

³⁷ Putnam and Campbell, 132.

³⁸ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 201.

47 with insight from Alton Garrison.³⁹ This model determines our budget, calendar and leadership discussion. The five overlapping characteristics of the church include, *Connection* (they were devoted to fellowship and breaking bread), *Growth* (they devoted themselves to the disciples' teaching), *Service* (they taught, baked bread, prayed for one another, shared things in common and distributed to the needs of others), and *Going* (they worshipped and reached out both within their homes and in the Temple). At the center of their corporate lives was *Worship* (praising God and communion). In fact, each one of these environs overlap as an act of worship by themselves. The result of this process was Spirit-enthused church growth: "The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

At the close of 2013, NLA had sixteen different *Life Groups* (small discipleship groups) focusing on different aspects of discipleship. As part of discipleship, each group is encouraged to serve in the broader community in a manner that meets their individual gifting. Some of the recent projects included cooking and serving at the local food bank, building shelves for a foster care agency, and sponsoring local needs children for Christmas.

The Assumption of the Study

After engaging a theological and biblical understanding of Divine hospitality as a framework for our one's discipleship process, the follower of Christ's perspective about themselves will be change: they will have a deeper appreciation and understanding of hospitality's role in their life. Moreover, they will then have an increased appreciation of the stranger as a potential friend. By doing so, both the host (disciple) and guest

³⁹ Alton Garrison, *The Acts 2 Church: A Guide for Growing Your Church* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004), 6.

(stranger) are placed on holy ground where God's transformative Spirit resides. This is discipleship, when practices of Divine hospitality involve both a deeper knowledge of God but also behaving like Him. Disciples have a wider welcome for the stranger both inside and outside the church. And a discipleship process that includes hospitality at its center will positively impact a polarizing world for the gospel.

The Method of the Study

This project creates and implements a stratagem through a closed group discipleship class. The project consists of eight hour and a half sessions that initiates participants in the theological and biblical foundation for Divine hospitality as a framework for discipleship. Each class will provide time for group discussion on the topic at hand. The class will be limited to eight individuals for maximum group interaction. Topics are as follows:

- Session one: Introduction to Christian Hospitality – asking the question, “What makes Christian hospitality Christian?”
- Session two: Hospitality in the Old Testament – asking the question, “What does hospitality look like in the Old Testament?”
- Session three: Hospitality in the Life of Jesus Christ – asking the question, “What did Jesus say and do that modeled for the church hospitality?”
- Session four: Hospitality and the Early Church and Hospitality – asking the question, “How did the first Christians practice hospitality?”
- Session five: The Barriers to Hospitality – asking the question, – “What keeps us from being more hospitable to the stranger?”
- Session six: The Boundaries of Hospitality – asking the question, “Where are the fence lines of God’s hospitality?”
- Session seven: Hospitality and New Life Assembly – asking the question, ““How can we as a church widen our welcome today?”

- Session eight: Hospitality and Me – asking the question, “How does the class material pertain to all areas of my personal life?”

Christian discipleship measured from the class will be measurable with the employment and interpretation of the following: A hospitality pre- and post-self evaluation will be given to the attendees of the class. The results of the pre-survey will be measured and interpreted against the results of the post-survey.

The Limitations of the Study

This study is limited on several levels. First, it has been limited to participants and volunteers of New Life Assembly in Kittitas, Washington. Secondly, due to the sheer breadth of material surrounding the topic of biblical hospitality this study will limit itself to selected core samples from prominent biblical examples. That is, examples of hospitality will be drawn from the Pentateuch, Old Testament History books, Wisdom Literature, and the Prophets. In the New Testament, samples will be drawn from the Gospels, the epistles, Acts and Revelation.

Thirdly, the limit of this study does not include measuring attendee's behavior but rather their self perceptions as it concerns hospitable acts and attitudes. The premise is that the best transformation takes place when perceptions change before behavior.

Finally, this study is limited in the metaphorical use of God as 'Host.' Metaphors draw comparisons between two things. They work in that they compare two things, which although different, share something in common; in some way the two words or concepts overlap in meaning. They show us models that have a deeper and powerful meaning behind them. Bob Stallman adds that the Bible does not reveal God in the abstract, as he is within himself, but as he stands in association with humanity. Metaphors

enable us to participate in a relationship with God.⁴⁰ For example, God is also anthropomorphically depicted in the Bible as King, Shepherd, Father and Servant. Like any metaphor, they can be overreached or over interpreted. God is metaphorically a Host but he is Host in context to the genre. This study will be limited to the rule of context endeavoring to understand God as Host within the rules of proper exegesis and hermeneutics and by making a proper connection between the model the metaphor represents and the reality that stands behind it. If successfully done, the disciple “can gain a sense of perspective,”⁴¹ and hopefully, a new and dynamic one.

Conclusion

New Life Assembly has an opportunity to return to biblical hospitality, an often neglected and misunderstood Christian discipline. Hospitality is a bridge to the other. It crosses over the swift current of our polarizing and post-modern society and connects us to those not yet convinced of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It invites us not simply to be hosts and strangers to be guests, but it also invites God to transform both host and guest by His presence. Furthermore, by initiating and implementing a discipleship stratagem with hospitality at its center, we link the call to discipleship to the call to hospitality. Members will gain fresh insights into their own roles as hosts in this world and see anew the stranger before them as a type of *Christ* (Matthew 25:31-46). And by doing so, The Great Commission will be more fully embraced and the community of faith more fully enlivened.

⁴⁰ Robert Stallman, *Divine Hospitality in the Pentateuch: A Metaphorical Perspective on God as Host*: (PHD Dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary. 1999), 68.

⁴¹ Stallman, 62.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Christ's words about how to be hospitable were also words about how to be a disciple. God's call to hospitality is one of the specifics within the general call to discipleship. Hospitality is an essential part of being a disciple. It is a piece of the pie.

Michele Hershberger¹

Introduction

A church serious about fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and loving God with all of its heart, soul, mind and strength and their neighbor as themselves (Matt. 22:35-40), must have a strong biblical and theological foundation. Otherwise, ambiguity and disorientation will lead to missional fatigue, and ultimately, missional failure. A church serious about reflecting God's welcome in this world must also know, not only the 'how's' to be hospitable, but also the 'why's' of Christian hospitality.

Hans Boersma wrote, "Hospitality is not only or even a primarily a human virtue, but it is a virtue that has a divine origin; it is a divine virtue. As a divine virtue, it gives expression to the very character of God."² It is the thesis of this project that God's hospitality as reveal in Scripture provides a framework for discipleship; that is, when a person experiences genuine spiritual conversion and begins the life-long journey of

¹ Michele Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 129.

² Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 27.

spiritual transformation into the image of Jesus Christ, which is the goal of all Christian discipleship, she will be increasingly attentive to the stranger in their midst and provide a wider and warmer welcome. Discipleship is, as Michele Hershberger claims, a piece of the discipleship pie. Therefore, if a church seeks to fully participate in the Great Commission it must first have a proper theological foundation on which to reflect and understand its mission. An important part of that foundation is biblical hospitality as central discipleship.

This chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section titled *Key Theological Concepts* addresses key biblical and theological concepts surrounding Christian hospitality. A special emphasis will be placed on biblical hospitality's relationship with the following themes: *Triune Perichoresis and the Image of God, Sin and the Image of God, Christian Formation, Conversion, and Discipleship*.

The second major section entitled *Hospitality* will provide brief commentary on core samples taken from biblical texts. The subsections include the following titles: *Cultural Backdrop to Ancient Near Eastern Hospitality, Towards a Definition of Hospitality, and Examples of Old Testament Hospitality* (includes discussions of *Yahweh as Host of Creation, Abraham and Sarah Host Three Strangers and Israel's Self-Identification as Strangers*). The second major section will conclude with *New Testament Hospitality* (includes discussions of *Hospitality in the Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ; and, Hospitality in the Life and Ministry of the Early Church*). A *Summary* discussing the overlapping themes of the two sections will conclude the chapter as a whole.

Key Theological Concepts

Triune Perichoresis and Image of God

The Bible states that humans were made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28).

Theologians throughout history have wrestled with the exact meaning and understanding of what it means to be made in God's image. In what way are we in God's image? There are several attributes that humans possess that reflect God's image in a way that the rest of creation does not. People, both male and female possess personalities, reason, a moral aptitude, and a spiritual capacity to commune with God by God's Spirit that is qualitatively different than the rest of creation.³ A special status and responsibility is given to humanity that is not shared with plants or animals. A significant aspect of this responsibility lies in the relational aspect of bearing God's image.

Stanley Grenz, in *Theology for the Community of God*, asserts that terms “image” (מְלֹאָה) and “likeness” (לִמּוֹת) in Genesis 1:26-27, carry the sense of “representation.”⁴ These terms indicate there is something within God's nature that humans can replicate or resemble that corresponds to the original.⁵ Grenz suggests that discussions surrounding God's image should not emphasize compartmentalizing one aspect of personhood over and against another; rather, God's image should be viewed, and this is important, in terms of purpose more than nature of being: “The image of God is a social rather than an individual concept.”⁶ Man was made for communion with God (John 4:24) and communion with one another. It should not come as a surprise to discover that ultimately

³ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1017.

⁴ Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing), 174.

⁵ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect, 1998), 76.

⁶ Grenz, 175.

the image of God should focus on community since God's self-disclosed image and nature is triune. The Bible reveals that God is three distinct Persons, one, yet three; a triune relationship within the Godhead where love is the central attribute (1 John 4:8). The Father is God (Isa. 45:6, 7), the Son is God (John 1:1, 14) and the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3, 4).

The early Church Fathers used the Greek word *perichoresis* in discussing the relational nature of the Trinity.⁷ *Perichoresis* is derived from the Greek *peri-*, 'around' and *chorein*, which can mean 'to make room for.' The Apostle Mark uses *chorein* in recording Jesus return to Capernaum (Mk 2:2): "So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them" (Mark 2:2 - emphasis mine).⁸ *Perichoresis* carries with it the idea of mutual room making for the other within a loving interplaying community.

The concept of God's nature as *perichoretic* speaks out against the present evangelical emphasis of a 'me and Jesus' form of Christian faith. There is within God's nature an image to be reflected and that image is a loving community where unity and diversity coexist and move about in perfect communion. We are created in the image of God and that image means we are created for community; communing with God and with one another. This is when we are most truly human, when we willingly participate in loving interdependence with others and the church is a community defined by this same *perichoresis*.

Jürgen Moltmann focused on the Trinitarian nature of God as the paradigm for human community: "True human fellowship is to correspond to the triune God and be his

⁷ The term *perichoresis* as applied to the Trinity is accredited to Gregory of Nazianzus (4th cen. AD).

⁸ All citing of Scripture will be from the New International Version unless otherwise noted. *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984).

image on earth. True human fellowship will participate in the inner life of the triune God.”⁹ God’s nature is relational and humanity only fully reflects God’s image within the context of life in community with others. Furthermore, only in fellowship with others can we show forth what God is like, for God is “the community of love – the eternal relationship enjoyed by the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ There is a plurality within God that lives in “timeful communion” not in eternal isolation.¹¹ In the final understanding of the nature of God’s image it must be understood as love expressed within a loving community that is open to the world because God is open to the world, this is God’s essential nature: love and community. And bearing God’s image is a matter of God’s mission on earth.

Christopher Wright suggests that reflecting God’s image in this world has missional significance. The implications suggest that all human beings have dignity and equality. Since all people have God’s image they are worthy of value and love. Therefore, Christian mission must treat all people with dignity and love.¹² Wright points out that when God created Eve to be with Adam, God declared the new relationship ‘good’ (Gen. 2:18). The implication is that there was something that was incomplete about man being alone. Loneliness is not just an emotional issue it is a creational one.¹³ The mandate to be a steward of the Garden of Eden; to fill the earth and subdue it and rule over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:28), requires companionship and assistance. At

⁹ Jürgen Moltman, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Fortress: Minneapolis, MN: 1993), 131. Trans. Margaret Kohl, (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1980). In Moltmann’s ensuing volumes he developed a theology of creation, Christology, pneumatology, and eschatology, all of which illuminate how human beings become visible images of this Trinitarian fellowship on earth.

¹⁰ Grenz, 179.

¹¹ Robert Vosloo, “Identity, Otherness and the Triune God: Theological Groundwork for a Christian Ethic of Hospitality,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 119 (July 2004), 69-89.

¹² Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 423.

¹³ Wright, 428.

creation, people are given the reciprocal DNA of interdependency. “Humanity, then, is created in relationship, for relationship, and for a task that requires relational cooperation,” Wright adds.¹⁴ The task of right living within community was intended to take place between individuals, in families, in the workplace, throughout society and between nations. To be made in God’s image, then, is to live in right relationship with God and with one another in loving welcome. This was the original blueprint. But then sin broke into this world.

Sin and the Image of God

What is sin? In the Bible, sin is described in a variety of ways. Sin is a transgression of God’s law (1 John 3:4; Rom. 4:15) and a lack of faith in God’s goodness (Rom. 14:23). Transgression and faithlessness are the overarching biblical concepts of sin and which were at play when Adam and Eve first rejected God’s hospitality in the Garden of Eden. They broke the house rules – eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:1-7) – and they did so because they believed the serpent and lacked faith in the goodness of God (Gen. 3:4-5). Sin is a rejection and rebellion against God’s design for his creation. It is primarily aimed at God (Psalm 51:4) and the impact of sin is universal (Rom. 3:23) for no one escapes sin’s wages of death. But sin is more than a transgression or a lack of faith; it is also a move away from the Creator and His *Shalom*.

There are four main Hebrew roots for sin and (*חַטָּאת*) is the most common and its derivatives convey the underlying image of missing the mark.¹⁵ In a non-moral sense, the root of this word is used in the description of the seven hundred left-handed warriors who

¹⁴ Wright, 428.

¹⁵ B. A. Milne with J.M., “Sin,” *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1105.

could shoot their slings without missing (Jud. 20:16). The vast majority of Old Testament usages refer to moral and religious derivation (i.e., Lam. 5:7). In the New Testament the principal term is *hamartia*. It also refers to missing the target or taking the wrong road (James 1:15; 1 John 1:8). The Bible paints the picture of sin in terms of a movement away from an original design. It is a straying from a fold, overstepping a line and failure to see real living. Geoffrey Bromiley describes sin as a “partly depressing, partly ludicrous caricature of genuine human life.”¹⁶ Sin is a willful and rebellious departure and distortion from the *perichoretic* life of God. It is more than a breaking a code, it is a breach and betrayal of our fellowship with God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Sin amounts to “an unraveling of our personal identity – a turning away from the life-giving energy that holds all things in life.”¹⁷ Sin disrupts fellowship and breaks *shalom*.

Cornelius Plantinga in *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* helpfully describes God's shalom as the “webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight.”¹⁸ This is what the Hebrew prophets called shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight – a right state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “Sin,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988) 519.

¹⁷ Joy Ann McDougall. “The Return of Trinitarian Praxis? Moltmann on the Trinity and the Christian Life.” *The Journal of Religion*, 83, No. 2 (April, 2003) pp. 177-203. 202.

¹⁸ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

¹⁹ Plantinga, Jr., 10.

Plantinga then offers this view of sin: "Sin is not only a breaking of law but also the breaking of covenant with one's savior. Sin is the smearing of a relationship, the grieving of one's divine parent and benefactor, a betrayal of the partner to whom one is joined by a holy bond."²⁰ He continues, "Sin is culpable shalom-breaking."²¹ This underlies the seriousness of sin in the discipleship of a follower of Christ. Sin moves one from loving in the right direction. Richard Baxter wrote, "Sin is manifested in each individual by his turning away from God's rule to his own self-rule, caused by an 'inordinate self-love.' Sin results from seeking happiness in the wrong way."²² There can be no proper relationship as long as sin dominates our relationships. After all, it's hard to love our neighbor while we are looking in the mirror or restricting our relationships to people who like us.²³

Sin is always an attempt to distort God's image in humanity leaving a need for a transformational re-stamping of God's image and conversion back to God's *perichoretic* life.

Christian Formation

Christian formation begins with a life-changing encounter with the triune God which inaugurates the process of forsaking our old ways as fallen creatures and living in accordance with God's design for human existence. It includes a spiritual conversion to

²⁰ Plantinga, Jr., 12.

²¹ Plantinga, Jr., 14.

²² Timothy Beougher, *Richard Baxter and Conversion: A Study of Puritan Concept of Becoming a Christian* (Scotland, UK: Mentor, 2007), 47.

²³ Leighton Ford points out that fellowship with the Holy Spirit will inevitably lead to fellowship with people who are different from us: "The first barrier that needed to be broken down was within the minds of the disciples themselves. It was a barrier of prejudice. These early Christians had heard Jesus say, "When you go to be my witnesses, you must start at Jerusalem, then go to Judea, and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth." but what Jesus said and what the early Christians thought he said were two different things. They heard the words of Jesus through the filter of their ethnic prejudice. They thought He said, 'You shall be my witnesses to the Jews in Jerusalem, to the Jews in Judea, to the Jews in Samaria, and to the Jews in the uttermost parts of the earth.' They didn't understand that the fellowship of the Holy Spirit was about to extend to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. That was the barrier in their minds." Leighton Ford, *The Power of Story*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 154.

Jesus Christ and an on-going conversion throughout the Christian's life. Conversion is not the end of Christian experience but the beginning. Conversion is the beginning of God's restored image being painted upon the ceiling of the human soul.

There is an old saying that there is really only one tragedy in human life – the failure to become a saint. The purpose of human life is to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16), to grow up into him who is our head, Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:15), so that we become mature or perfect in Christ (Eph 4:13). Paul, when writing to the church in Galatia, took on the role of a mother in childbirth for those he was discipling stating he was once again “in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed” in them (Gal. 4:19). The Greek word for *formed* (*μορφώω, morphe*) carries with it the idea of fashioning like an artist who shapes their material into an image.²⁴ One may think of a bonsai artist shaping a tree or a potter shaping a bowl on a potter’s wheel. Becoming a Christian is here depicted in terms of birth where one enters into a new world and changes and grows by the social shaping of a loving parent. Christ dwells in the hearts of all true Christians in order that the “Christ-life” may come into the form in believers.²⁵ Christian formation includes two closely related concepts, *conversion* and *discipleship*, that require further commentary.²⁶

Conversion

Christian conversion is the grace-given and faith-driven process from a fallen state to the image of Jesus Christ that continues until creation meets Creator. It is the trailhead to the path of holiness.²⁷ It has a beginning at the moment of a person’s

²⁴ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 4, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 753.

²⁵ Gerhard Kittel, et.al., 753.

²⁶ The discussion of theological concepts such as spiritual formation, conversion and discipleship are limited to a supporting role in this project. The exhaustive nature of what these terms mean and how they are applied as viewed throughout history and by multiple contexts warrants restraint.

²⁷ Timothy K. Beougher, *Richard Baxter and Conversion: A Study of the Puritan Concept of Becoming a*

salvation and continues on from there. It is also the goal of every Christian. The Apostle Luke writes in Acts that Jesus Christ sent Paul to the Gentiles “to *open their eyes*, that they may *turn* (convert) … from the power of Satan *to God*, that they may receive *forgiveness of sins* and a place among those who are *sanctified* (made acceptable) *by faith in me*” (26:18). Paul calls Gentiles to “*repent and turn* (convert) *to God*” (26:20), and God opens “*a door of faith*” (14:27) to them, resulting in “the *conversion of the Gentiles*” (15:3).

Conversion means a commitment to God through repentance and faith. It is only by a spiritual conversion that one becomes a Christian in the full scriptural sense. Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born again, born of the Spirit (John 3:5-8). The goal of conversion is a transformed humanity. Through conversion, the Spirit of God enables humanity to be like Jesus in order that people might be more fully themselves. Gordon Smith states that the end result we seek in spiritual formation – to be transformed in the image of Jesus – has a deep social dimension that enables people to experience reciprocal love within a community.²⁸ “This means at the very least,” Smith concludes, that conversion must lead to a “demonstration of genuine hospitality and generosity toward others.”²⁹

When a person comes to faith in Christ and becomes the ‘people of God’ (1 Pet. 2:10), more is involved than a confession of faith and baptism. Conversion is not simply an individual affair for conversion has ever widening ramifications. Full and complete conversion has a missional trajectory, moving from a conversion to Jesus Christ to a

Christian (Geanies House, Scotland: Mentor Imprint by Christian Focus, 2007).

²⁸ Gordon Smith, *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion and Authentic Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2001) 141.

²⁹ Gordon Smith. 26.

conversion to the Church, to a conversion to service in the world from who Christ died.³⁰ This is a conversion from self-centeredness to an attention to others. People move from self-love to agape love, from non-discipleship to discipleship, from an orientation of being served to serving others. When people receive God's hospitable gift of Christ, it is a conversion from inhospitable to hospitable living. This is the context of the birth of the church (Acts 2: 38-42). We are transformed for the healing purpose of loving others. This is the healing of shalom and the transforming of our nature into that of Christ. Christian formation then includes an on-going conversion into all things Jesus: his speech, thinking, time management, relationships, worship, and his hospitality. Steven Wilkins summarizes as to why hospitality is ultimately a conversion and salvation issue:

Salvation is deliverance from the death and isolation of sin. Salvation brings us back into the life, love, and communion of the Triune God. It is, in the fullest sense, life. Life is restoration to communion, or perhaps better, restoration into the life of the Triune community (thus, we are baptized "into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit"). Salvation involves a restoration of the image of God in us. Salvation makes us like God again – and that means that salvation is inescapably social. It doesn't happen in isolation from others. God works through others to bring us to Himself and to restore His image in us.³¹

Discipleship

The Greek word *mathētēs* means disciple. The plural form *mathētai* is used about the church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1) and in Ephesus (Acts 19:9). In Acts 11:26, Luke writes a particularly important sentence, "In Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians." This means that Christ followers were known as disciples before they were known as Christians. The implication is that all Christians are disciples. The titles

³⁰ Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003) 152.

³¹ Steve Wilkins, *Face to Face: Meditations on Friendship and Hospitality* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2010), 8.

Christian and disciple were inexorably combined. If you were a Christian you were a disciple of Christ and vice versa. In the New Testament, there was no concept of non-discipleship Christianity or non-discipleship church.

A disciple is a learner or student. A Christian is always a student of life in relationship to Jesus. A disciple learns by hearing from his master and doing what the master does. From its inception the church was a school of Jesus. Following the master was essential to becoming like the master. The means God chose to achieve the ends of effective discipleship are intentional relationships.

Discipleship is Jesus' charge, process, and call given to all Christians. It is a charge in that Jesus' authority is given for the task in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). The goal of the charge is to "go, make disciples of all nations." It is a process in that the means by which Christians proceed in participating with Christ through the Holy Spirit is through the dual agencies of baptism and teaching, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit", and teaching, "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20).

Discipleship is also a call. Jesus called his disciples to "follow me." He calls them to a life learning relationship. His teaching was not limited to an office or classroom. He took his disciples on the road and taught as a master to an apprentice, not in a woodshop or a mechanics garage, but in all aspects of faithful living whether that be in a shop, in a synagogue, talking to strangers, hosting and being hosted, celebrating dinners and holidays, going fishing and spiritual disciplines like prayer, worship and fasting. They literally had to follow him in order to be his disciple. Following Jesus is learning from

Jesus through personal devotion to him as Lord, obedience to his word; ultimately it's becoming like him.

Discipleship and conversion are related terms. Conversion is the trailhead to God's image and discipleship is the hike. Christian formation can be defined as the God-enabled, life-long spiritual process of growth towards wholeness and healing in Christ. It is the journey of being transformed by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of Christ, experiencing and expressing his love for God and for others. It becomes clearer to see that Christian formation and discipleship are two terms for the same reality—spiritual transformation into “the fullness of the stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). Both demand commitment, discipline and a deep reliance on God’s grace. God’s mission is to restore God’s image in humanity. It is to restore people to Christ likeness – in all of his beauty – including his hospitality towards others.

Hospitality

Cultural Backdrop to Ancient Near Eastern Hospitality

When it came to the practice of hospitality, Jews and Christians were not unique in the ancient world. Hospitality was embedded into the ancient Mediterranean world and is still to this day a central aspect of life and practice. It was not just a private matter but it was understood in the context of a much larger view of life and community as for many, especially the Jews, a sign of God’s presence in that community and so it was an embodiment of a biblical ethic.³² In short, treating others, especially the strangers, was a sacred act. The two parties, host and guest formed a partnership. The host would provide a warm welcome in the way of food, lodging and protection. The stranger was invited

³² Amy Oden, ed., *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 16.

into a “safe, personal, and comfortable place, a place of respect and acceptance and friendship.”³³ The guest would provide stories from the outside world. Within the ancient Near East society nearly everything was made with hospitality in mind. For example, how they built their homes and made their meals was hospitable in nature.

For those in the Roman world who did not live a nomadic life³⁴ or live in poverty, which was the majority of people, many of their homes (Latin - *domus*) were constructed as atriums-houses.³⁵ The early Latin architect Vitruvius stated that the design and the furnishings of a house should be made so that everyone had the right to enter a “vestibule, atrium, and peristyle, reserving as private space for the family only bedrooms, dining rooms, and baths!”³⁶

The house was a place that was open and visible so that others would be drawn into it. The owners then were on display for public viewing. In 91 B.C.E., a plebeian tribune by the name of Livius Drusus, rebuked his architect for suggesting that his house be made private so that no one could look inside: “No, you should apply our skills to arranging my house so that whatever I do should be visible to everybody.”³⁷ These open designs, which are so foreign to the western mindset, provide insight into Paul’s words to the Corinthian house churches: “If, therefore, the whole church comes together..., and outsiders or unbelievers enter [the house uninvited] ...” (1 Cor. 14:23). The open design also sheds light on the story of a woman who comes uninvited into a house and anoints Jesus while he is reclining in a dining room (Luke 7:36-50), and Luke only comments

³³ Christine Pohl, 13.

³⁴ Hershberger, 18. In nomadic life where food, lodging and security were not taken for granted, hospitality was a matter of survival. The wanderer was dependent upon the host for physical needs and the host was dependent upon the guest for informational needs as to the stories shared about the larger world.

³⁵ Caroline Osiek, David L. Bach, eds., *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 10.

³⁶ Osiek, 17.

³⁷ Osiek, 24.

that “she knew he is reclining in the house...” (Luke 7:37). Many homes were designed with hospitality in mind and it became a central prop to the biblical mission and story.

It is also difficult to appreciate the ancient Near Eastern practice of meals and their preparation as a hospitable act without understanding the dinner furnishings and concept of the meal covenant. It was not usual by the time of Jesus that people ate reclining at a *triclinium* (*tri* – three; *clinium* – recline) table. It was a low, three-sided table with an open entrance for servants. People would recline around the three sides, leaning on their left sides while eating with their right hands. At this table were reserved places for people according to their role and social capital. There was a place for the host and the guest of honor. Jim Fleming argues for the probability that Jesus was the host of the Last Supper, and Judas was his guest of honor as Jesus offered Judas the *sop*, a delectable gift for the most honored guest (emphasis mine).³⁸

The meal covenant concept emerges early in the context of the biblical story. The oldest banquet scene from the seal of Ur, Mesopotamia (2,600 B.C.E.), depicts people eating a meal in a covenantal setting.³⁹ In the biblical narrative, many meal scenes would have been understood as a covenant constituting the act of forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace-making. For example, Isaac and Abimelech seal their treaty by eating a meal together (Gen. 26:27-30); Jacob and his uncle Laban settle their differences by sharing food (Gen. 29:1-31); and the Psalmist writes, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (Ps. 23:5). Fleming suggests this table preparation should be understood as God making reconciliation possible between David and his enemies rather

³⁸ Jim Fleming, “The Passover and the Last Supper,” *Biblical Resources - Cassette Tape Lecture Series*, (New York, NY: 1985).

³⁹ Fleming 1985.

than God simply demonstrating his identity and love for David.⁴⁰ When Jesus shares the Last Supper, he does so in the context of the Passover Meal, which echoes covenants in both testaments. Jesus teaches about a Prodigal Son who returns to share a meal with a forgiving father (Lk. 15:11-32). Jesus is accused of eating with tax collectors and sinners and people grew angry and bewildered because they knew that reconciliation was being offered. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus stands and knocks on doors waiting for people to respond so that he may “come in and eat with them, and he with me.”

The practice of hospitality in the biblical story is interwoven deep within the cultural context of its time. Nonetheless, the teaching and examples that emerges out of Scripture should not be dismissed as out-dated cultural practices. The Scriptures repeatedly emphasize (and command!) the importance of hospitality. We also have examples from centuries of tradition and in many ways the risks people faced in the ancient world are similar to ones many people encounter today: social displacement, unexpected tragedies, travel to unfamiliar places, and a sense of vulnerability in an unfamiliar setting.

Towards a Definition of Hospitality

Google “hospitality” and in 0.18 seconds fifty-six million three hundred thousand hits appear on all things hospitality: definitions, job opportunities, news headlines, music groups, college degrees, hospitals, hotels, cruise lines, famous quotes, and travel management. Ask members of churches what comes to mind what they hear the word “hospitality” and one may hear several different descriptions. For many, perhaps fine china and a clean house come to mind. For others, memories of hotel or restaurant experiences come to mind. But few, in all probability, when asked would answer: “God.

⁴⁰ Fleming 1985.

God comes to mind.” Yet divine hospitality saturates the Bible. Stories of guests and strangers, meals and hosts are a fundamental part of the narrative. God displayed it and commanded its practice, Jesus taught his disciples about the importance of the practice using parables and object lessons to show the disciples the true nature of the Kingdom of God. His disciples then went out and taught other disciples the same things. As a result, a distinctive Christian understanding of hospitality developed in the first centuries of the church. It was an essential part of one’s identity in both Testaments.

It should be noted that there is no extant Hebrew term for ‘host,’ ‘guest,’ or hospitality.⁴¹ The archaic expressions of “Lord of Hosts” and “God of Hosts” (Jer. 44:7) appear 245 and 40 times respectively in the King James Version of the OT. These epithets have nothing to do with hospitality and are translated by the NIV using the word “Almighty” because they refer to “he who is sovereign over all the “hosts” (powers) in heaven and on earth, especially over the “hosts” (armies) of Israel” (NIV). But hospitality is not absent in the Old Testament. It is found in the Old Testament narrative, laws, and prophetic material. It is found in God’s nature and within the broader sociological dimensions of hospitality, such as, the provision of clothing and lodging, foot washing and other hygienic concerns, care for a person’s animals, acts of charity and social welfare in general, enforced hospitality (legal), and the rendering of services for payment. Ancient Israelite hospitality can be understood from a deduction of Old Testament texts where God is assuming a role of host to His creation and where people are offering food or lodging to guests.⁴²

A helpful understanding of hospitality can be discovered in the Greek and Latin

⁴¹ Stallman, 114.

⁴² Stallman, 156.

words' etymology. In the New Testament, the word translated "hospitality" (*φιλοξενία*) is more expressive than the English because it means "love of strangers" (*φίλος*, "friend," and *ξένος*, "stranger").⁴³ At the very least, hospitality is the welcoming of the stranger. Hospitality, in the Latin *hospitium* (or its adjective *hospitale*), which derives from *hospes*, means both guest and host.⁴⁴ This suggests a strong connection between the two when hospitality is present. One finds in the root meaning a deeper sense of welcome that transcends fine linen and table manners.

Beyond Abraham and Sarah, hospitality was often held up in Jewish antiquity as a prized virtue of their society. For example, other Old Testament examples include Rahab (Josh 2:1-21, cf. Heb 11:31, Jas 2:25), the old man who receives the Lévite and his concubine (Judg 19:15-18), Samuel (1 Sam 9:18-27), the woman of Shunem who builds a room for Elisha (2 Kgs 4:8-36), and Job (Job 31:32). And of course, Yahweh is the hospitable image that others emulate, for He "defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing" (Dt. 10:18).

There are other hospitable elements that permeate the backdrop of the Old Testament as well: strangers seeking hospitality from relatives (Gen. 24:15-27); the host is looking for guests in the distance (Gen. 18:2; 19:1, 43:16, Judg. 19:3, 19:17); guests are often times portrayed as passing through and come without foreknowledge (Gen. 18:3, 2 Kgs. 4:8) or as needing help (Gen. 24:17, 23; Josh 9:6); the host provides water for drink and cleansing (Gen. 18:4, 19:2, 24:32, 43:24, Judg. 19:21) and the list goes on. Hospitality soaks the pages of Scripture.

⁴³ R.H. Mounce, *Romans*, 27, New American Commentary Series, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 238.

⁴⁴ "Guest-Host." Encyclopedia of Religion (Provo, UT: Macmillan Publishing, 1995), 1:417.

After considering elements to hospitality, a definition can now be offered. It is worth noting what hospitality is not. It is not a place to strengthen one's position of power or status. Nor is it a place where hospitality is only offered to people in our own social tribe. Inhospitality is "where you feel invisible," Parker Palmer notes, "or a place where you are visible but judged."⁴⁵

Hospitality, on the other hand, is an intentional act and a state of being that responds to others in a Christ-like manner, whoever they may be. Biblical hospitality includes not only the concepts of guests, visitors, and the offering of meals and lodging to them; it also includes making the stranger feel valued and at home. Our home, whether that is a place where one sleeps, studies, plays or the marketplace, is a place where the stranger might become a friend. The core understanding of biblical hospitality seems to be the belief and experience that God is present in the context of "hospitality, visiting, welcoming, healing, transforming, gathering God's people."⁴⁶ Arthur Sutherland offers this working definition of hospitality, "In light of Jesus' life, death resurrection, and return, Christian hospitality is the intentional, responsible, and caring act of welcoming or visiting, in either public or private places, those who are strangers, enemies, or distressed, without regard for reciprocation."⁴⁷

At the very least, hospitality is a worldview. It is a way of seeing others and our world through the lens of God's own hospitality to humanity. It includes a state of

⁴⁵ Parker Palmer, *Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 67.

⁴⁶ Ivonei Fabiano Grolli. *Esta Cama Nos Cayo Del Cielo: A Theology of Christian Hospitality*. M.A. requirement for Catholic Theological Union of Chicago. April, 2008. 22.

⁴⁷ Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), viii.

readiness to initiate welcome to strangers and neighbors, even the ‘least of them’ without any expectation of reward.

The Bible offers many examples of hospitality that lend themselves for Christian reflection. Examples from both Testaments are now examined in brief. From the Old Testament, examples of Yahweh as Host of Creation (Genesis 1-2) Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18); the Exodus and Israel’s self-Identification as strangers (Leviticus 19:33-34). New Testament examples will include Jesus’ life and ministry and the life and a survey of writings of the early church.

Old Testament Hospitality

Yahweh as Host of Creation

In Genesis, Yahweh creates the heavens and the earth. As His climatic conclusion he creates Adam and Eve in His image (Gen. 1:26-27) and invites them into the Garden of Eden to live and move and have their being (Gen. 1:29; 2:8-9). The presence of hospitality is given in the terms within the semantic range of food and drink, verbs of welcoming and ingestion, as well as the accessories of cuisine can signal the influence of an implicit model as ‘God is host.’⁴⁸

It is in the creation account that we find God’s hospitality as host of creation (his house) and the garden (his meal) as foundational to salvation history. God’s first words to humanity are “from all these trees, eat!” (Gen. 2:16). There is no metaphor here, the Hebrew verb ‘eat’ (**אָכַל**) means to consume food.⁴⁹ The emphasis on God’s imperative is positive not negative; every tree but one is given to humanity for food. The Garden shows

⁴⁸ Sutherland, viii.

⁴⁹ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Electronic ed., HGK430. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1997.

God's gracious abundance as host, as well as, shows that man is essentially hungry (Gen. 2:9). The Host meets the hospitable needs of the guest.

The creation account suggests that God invites humanity to partake of the table he has prepared for them; however certain foods are off limits. Adam and Eve's sin was fundamentally a refusal to listen to the host and to eat behind his back. They refused to eat at his table according to his house rules. As a result of sin, humanity broke relationship with God and with one another. The hospitable image of God was smeared and was in need of repair.

Abraham and Sarah Host Three Strangers

Of all the examples of human hospitality illustrated in Scripture, the story of Abraham and Sarah's reception of three mysterious strangers at the Oak of Mamre is regarded as the classic exemplar for welcoming strangers.⁵⁰ Abraham has become a type of patron saint of hosts.⁵¹ Genesis 18 begins with an account of Abraham welcoming three unknown travelers into his camp to eat and refresh themselves.

The story tells of an excited Abraham who knows the privilege and personal involvement it takes to take care of these men. He runs to them, bows towards them, begs them not to pass without stopping for a meal and rest, and wants to honor them with his hospitality. Sarah cooks them a meal without taking exception to the intrusion, and while they are eating, Abraham waits in the shadows. This is a story that is pregnant with theological significance. Somewhere in the encounter, they discover that God is present.

⁵⁰ For an interesting discussion concerning the comparisons and contrasts between the hospitality of Melchizedek and Abraham's reception of the three strangers and to which should be considered the paradigm of human hospitality, see Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen's article. "Abraham's Hospitality," *Jewish Bible Quarterly*. Vol. 34, no. 3, 2003. 168-172.

⁵¹ For further reading about this read: John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 15.

The clue, however, is in the beginning of the story where it begins, “The LORD appeared to Abraham” (18:1). This functions as a headline for chapters 18-19 where theophany characterizes the story lines.⁵² God’s presence is indicated by prophetic insights – the visitors bestow upon their hosts the gift of pronouncement of Sarah’s pregnancy (18:9-15). Divine presence is also indicated in the subsequent periscope of Abraham’s pleading for Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16-33). As the story transitions from hosting the strangers to overlooking Sodom, the narrative informs the reader that ‘the Lord’ is speaking to Abraham and we then later discover that two of the messengers head to Sodom and Abraham’s nephew Lot, and one stays with his host.⁵³ Because Abraham was hospitable these mysterious messengers blessed him with a new life and a future for his people and God’s presence was fully experienced. It’s a story that is full of mystery, blessing and promise.

Israel’s self-Identification as Strangers

The story of the Exodus is central to Jewish identity and worship. In the story, Israel is offered an identity and existence that will endure into the New Testament and beyond. When God freed Israel out of Egyptian bondage and gave the nation laws to mold and identify them as God’s people he commanded: “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 19:33-34). Except for the worship of the one God, no command is repeated

⁵² K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 1B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 216.

⁵³ For an excellent read on the hospitality of ‘righteous’ Lot (2 Peter 2:7-8) as an echo of Abraham’s own hospitality see T. Desmond Alexander, “Lot’s Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 104, no. 2 (1985) 289-291.

more often than those to love the alien in the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁴ Later, when Israel was sent into Babylonian exile they once again reflected on their status as strangers (Ezek. 1:1). J. M. Cameron explains:

The Israelites did not think of themselves as autochthonous [indigenous; native to the region]; they were the people of the Covenant, they were constituted a holy community by God's choice; and what they were never to forget was that they had been brought out of the land of Egypt, where they were *gerim*, strangers. *Ger, gerim* are words that denote status, not ethnic origin; the *ger*, Israelite or not, who lives within a community is a resident alien, a metic [a resident alien in an ancient Greek city, having some of the privileges of citizenship], as an Israelite was in Babylon during the Exile.⁵⁵

The Israelites were to encourage strangers to settle among them, that they might be brought to the knowledge and worship of the true God; and from this viewpoint, they were directed to treat them not as aliens, but as friends, on the basis that they themselves were strangers in Egypt. Strangers to Israel then, were supposed to be kindly and hospitably received into their community.⁵⁶

New Testament Hospitality

Hospitality in the Life and Ministry of Jesus

This call to remember Israel's alien status during the Exodus found its way into the theological mindset of Jesus' first disciples. The Apostle Peter describe the church as "God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and

⁵⁴ William O'Neill, "'No Longer Strangers' (Ephesians 2:19): The Ethics of Migration." *Word and World*, 29, no. 3. (Summer 2009), 228.

⁵⁵ J.M. Cameron, "Love Which Neighbor? By Morton Smith," *The New York Review of Books*, 27, no. 12 (July 17, 1980), n.p. (cited 12 May 2002). <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1980/jul/17/love-which-neighbor/> (Accessed January 28, 2014).

⁵⁶ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 33–34.

sprinkling by his blood..." (1 Pet. 1:1-2). The author of Hebrews described God's people as 'strangers and pilgrims on earth' (Heb. 11:13).

It is the identification with Jesus himself as a 'poor, wayfaring stranger,' as the African American spiritual describes, that the disciple of Christ takes to heart and considers the way of those around them they do not know, or might think they know but do no. The message is thus: God loves and plays host to the stranger, the people of God too must love and host the stranger. A Christian identification as a beloved stranger serves as an impetus to love and host other strangers in our midst. Failure to see the link between Christ's teachings and the Exodus wanderings is, in the words of Sutherland, the danger of being confronted with the opening words of the Gospel of John, "He was in the world, and thought the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..." (John 1: 10-12). There was no room for Jesus in the inn. In the context of biblical and ancient cultural practices of hospitality, it is beyond imagination.

Like a fish in water, Jesus was inseparable from the culture of welcome towards strangers. His missional strategies included the graceful hospitality of others. He sent disciples out without provision, counting on the entertainment along the way (Mark 6:7-13). This was Jesus' teaching and example. Jesus provided his disciples a pattern of life, especially in service, sacrifice, and openness and love for others (Jn 13:14-16; Heb. 12:2-3; 1 Jn 2:6). But not just what Jesus did, but how he did it, his qualities and care, are to be seriously consider in how one relates to others regardless of time period and culture (Phil. 2:4-5; Matt. 10:38; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23, 14:27).

It is God's will that his people follow Jesus' example and be conformed to his image. "For those God foreknew," Paul wrote, "he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son..." (Rom. 8:29). To the Corinthians he adds, "And just as we have born the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49). His disciples did indeed follow. Paul exhorted disciples to "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). "You became imitators of us and of the Lord...", Paul reminded the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:6). To be sure, the imitation that Paul speaks of is beyond hospitable acts, but it is not against it. Much of the emulation of Christ includes how we see and treat our neighbor and the stranger.

Did Christ emphasize hospitality in his life and ministry? Yes. He lives, eats, drinks and participates in the customs of hospitality of the ancient Near East. He comes as guest to a wedding in Cana (John 2:1-12) and is invited for dinners on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:36-50) and in both cases he becomes the host in order to display his glory. While at Peter's house (Matt. 8:14-15) he heals Peter's mother-in-law and she begins to show hospitality in return by 'waiting on him.' Later that evening, he drives out demons and heals the sick displaying God's power and compassion for those needing *shalom*. Zacchaeus, a despised tax collector, exchanges hospitality with Jesus when he invites Jesus over for dinner, and salvation enters Zacchaeus life when Jesus enters his doors.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Brendan Bryne suggests that when Jesus said, "Today, salvation has come to his house," it is meant as a sign for those watching and listening. "Today" echoes Jesus previous declaration of Messianic appointment in Nazareth (Lk. 4:21) and later when Jesus showed hospitality to the thief on the cross, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise" (23:43). "Today" serves as a trumpet call to others about the potential of hospitality. Byrne adds: "...the exchange of hospitality that occurs between himself and Jesus enlarges the sphere of God's hospitality. It challenges the community to become more effectively a beachhead of the kingdom, where lost human being can find welcome and new life in the grasp of a hospitable God."

But it wasn't just in deeds that Jesus emphasized hospitality, it was also an important part of his teaching. He teaches Simon the Pharisee lessons on hospitality when a woman crashes a party (Lk. 7:36-50). At another meal with a Pharisee, Jesus teaches again on the merits of divine hospitality. He miraculously feeds thousands (Mk 6:30-44, Mk 8:1-10) and on the night he was betrayed placed his disciples and himself within the Exodus story by sharing the Last Supper as a Passover meal.⁵⁸ Revealing his desire to nourish people spiritually as well as physically, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-20), and after his resurrection cooks a fish breakfast for his disciples (John 21:1-24).

Jesus condemns inhospitable practices (Mt. 10:8-15; Mk. 6:7-11; Lk 9: 3-6; Lk 10: 4-12). And shares parables illustrating what Kingdom hospitality looks like in dramatic pictures. He tells of a story of lost son(s) which is every bit about a hospitable Father as it is ungrateful and broken sons. He uses wedding banquets (Mt. 22:1-14) and highway muggings of Samaritans (Lk. 10:29-37) to show others God's love and compassion in real time. But throughout church history there have been two New Testament texts that have shaped the difference between conventional hospitality with divine hospitality more than any other of Jesus' teachings – Luke 14:12-14 and Matthew 25:31-36.

In Luke 14, Jesus notices how the guests are invited and where they sit around the table. Guests are jostling for power and prestige. Jesus instructs them on what Kingdom life looks like in terms of loving and welcoming others. And he does so by instructing his

Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 150-152.

⁵⁸ Further discussion on Jesus' hosting of the Last Supper and his death on the Cross as hospitable acts will be found in the literature review in chapter three.

host (v. 12) with these words:

When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

Jesus is pointing out that there is no hospitable difference in inviting only one's friends, relatives, and wealthy and influential neighbors to meals. This is the motivation of a world that seeks to cement relationships, reinforces social boundaries, and anticipates repayment from their guests.⁵⁹ In the Kingdom of God, the poor, crippled, lame, and blind are included and drawn into the festivities. No one is excluded except for those who reject the invitation, his invitation is universal. Jesus' point: as God welcomes all to the Kingdom of God, so human hosts ought to open their tables to those in need and who are not capable of repayment. The nature of divine hospitality frames appropriate earthly behavior.⁶⁰

Jesus takes the task of rigid and narrow dimensions of hospitality and intensifies the implications of hospitality in light of spiritual salvation in his parable of the Sheep and Goats (Matt. 25:31-46). In the end, the nations and individuals will be separated as a shepherd separates sheep from the goats. What is the criterion for separation? How one welcomes those around them. To receive the stranger is to receive Jesus, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (vv. 35-36).

⁵⁹ Pohl, 21.

⁶⁰ Pohl, 21.

The righteous will ask, “When did we do that?” Jesus continues, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (v. 40). Acts of welcoming and caring for the stranger and those in need go far beyond charity events that create goodwill and self-satisfaction. They are acts in this life connected to acts of hospitality in the Kingdom of God.

Hospitality in the Life and Ministry of the Early Church

In the New Testament, Jesus depended on the social practice of hospitality in completing his mission. In sending out his disciples (Lk. 10:7) to spread his gospel, Christians were commended for emulating Jesus’ own hospitality. Like Jesus, Paul and other leaders of the early church thought of the church in terms of a partnership with strangers.⁶¹

The first Christians embraced a hospitable worldview. Hospitality was simply a duty of God’s people and the early Christians responded.⁶² Following Jesus’ example, they made hospitality a prerequisite for church leadership (1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Tim. 5:9-10; Titus 1:8). It indicated true discipleship (Job 31:32; Matt. 25:35) and was to be offered to visiting ministers (Rom. 16:1-2; Col. 4:10; 3 Jn. 5-10). They understood hospitality, not as an option, but as a command (Isa. 58:6-7; Jn. 13:12-15; Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9; Heb. 13:2). It was a picture of salvation (Ps. 23:5-6; Rev. 3:20) and they taught that false teachers should not be welcomed (2 Jn. 10-11). All of these acts of hospitality – making it a requirement for leadership, seeing it as an evidence of genuine faith, determining it is an act of obedience and not optional, understanding salvation through hospitable images, and protecting the church from false teaching – was an act of loving God and neighbor

⁶¹ Koenig, 52.

⁶² M. H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies*, vol. 1 (London: Martin Manser, 2009), 1006.

and served the goal of fulfilling the Great Commission.

These men and women were living examples of 1 John 3:16: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” Hospitality was an act of love. “The Christian practice of hospitality was not viewed simply as a means of overcoming a practical problem,” Abraham Malherbe argues, “Theological statements by different authors in the New Testament show that it was frequently viewed as the concrete expression of Christian love.”⁶³ And it is the Spirit-infused acts of love that dominate Luke’s description of the early church in Acts.

Peter and Cornelius

In the New Testament, Luke records in both his gospel and in Acts the custom of hospitality as an integral part of the story. In Acts 10: 1-11, we have hospitality displayed on three separate occasions within a meeting between Peter and Cornelius. Cornelius, a God fearing Gentile centurion who lives in Caesarea (10:8), and Peter, a Jewish Palestinian turn Christian missionary, are led by the Holy Spirit to meet one another. They begin as strangers representing different worlds and worldviews. They are separated by a gulf of hostility, fear, judgment, cultural and ethnic caution, and have retreated to closed social societies.

Peter, having received hospitality from Simon the tanner in Joppa (9:43; 10:6) receives a vision from God that radically changes Peter’s view of what is clean and unclean. Three visitors come under the direction of the Holy Spirit and Peter offers them

⁶³ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge, LA: State University Press, 1977), 67.

hospitality by inviting them into their house (*εισκαλέομαι*) and extends hospitality (*ξενίζω*) to them as their host (10:23).

Peter's offer of hospitality is important in this story for three reasons.⁶⁴ It reflects his trust in God's moving through the company of strangers and his own intimate relationship with God and with the Jewish tradition of welcoming three others (i.e., Abraham and Sarah) and thus it appears that Luke may possibly be making the comparison between Peter and Abraham. Secondly, when Peter receives Cornelius's messengers, he is also receiving Cornelius. This was the cultural practice during the New Testament.⁶⁵ Thirdly, it lays the foundation for a reciprocal guest-host relationship. In 10:17, Peter (host) welcomes Cornelius' emissaries (guests) then to see the guests who welcome their old host, Peter, now as guest. Reciprocity was to be anticipated and we discover that hospitality played a significant part in the outreach and discipleship of Cornelius' household. The reciprocal nature of hospitable relationships is magnified in this scene.

The story reaches its apex when Peter arrives at Cornelius' house. Cornelius falls down at Peter's feet as if he was a god signifying Cornelius is spiritually in tune with divine matters. God is somehow present in this Spirit led encounter (see also, Acts 14:8-18 and 28:1-6). The crowd then receives Peter's gospel message and strangers become family. None of this would have taken place if Peter did not obey God's Spirit and deem

⁶⁴ Andrew E. Arterbury, "The Ancient Custom of Hospitality, The Greek Novels, and Acts 10:1-11:18," *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 29, no. 1 (Spring, 2002), 67.

⁶⁵ Arterbury: "For example, Matthew contends that the nations' responses to Christ's disciples are their responses to Christ himself (25:35, 38, 43, and 44). In addition, when Paul describes his hospitality in Galatia, he claims that the Galatians received him (emissary) as Christ himself (sender) (Gal 4:14, cf. 1 Cor 4:17). Likewise, the elder is insulted by Diotrephes, in 3 John 9-10, because Diotrephes refused to extend hospitality to the elder's emissaries. Finally, Ignatius, in his letter to the Ephesians, writes, "For everyone whom the master of the house sends to do his business ought we to receive (*δέχομαι*) as him who sent him" (6.1). Thus, [Margaret] Mitchell's research would suggest that Peter's response to Cornelius's emissaries is Peter's response to Cornelius." Arterbury, 67.

Cornelius worthy of association. This transcended Peter's understanding of what spiritual piety meant. To this point, Peter understood piety as avoided association with foreigners (Acts 10:28, 11:3).

In Acts 10: 1-11, Luke records the story of Peter and Cornelius, a Jew and Gentile and the ancient custom of hospitality merging by the work of the Holy Spirit. Peter spoke of his own spiritual encounter with God with these words, "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection" (Acts 10: 28-29).

Peter experienced a spiritual conversion. The Spirit compelled him to face his own sinful tendencies, discover a new identity, and become more welcoming.⁶⁶ Christian conversion is a conversion to a different worldview. Christians are transformed and called to see life through a new paradigm of hospitality. Peter finds himself at home in the home of a Gentile enemy. "We must see things differently," Bonhoeffer said, "see people differently. No longer does the Christian see persons nakedly, but through the eyes of Christ."⁶⁷ And it is in seeing people differently that leads to hospitality; and it is hospitality that leads to spiritual conversion. Peter's conversion led to Cornelius' and his household's conversion. Wrapped in this story is the God's use of hospitality to convert not only Cornelius' household but Peter and what would later be the conversion of the Jewish Christian leadership. This is in part the goal of Christian discipleship, to shape our hospitality into the hospitality of Jesus Christ. "Discipleship is not simply a program," Michael Wilkens adds, "Discipleship is becoming like Jesus as we walk with him in the

⁶⁶ Hershberger, 61.

⁶⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 257.

real world. And the real world begins in my home, in my closest relationships, in the moment-to-moment circumstances of life.”⁶⁸

Summary

What emerges from reviewing God’s hospitality as a paradigm for discipleship is the importance of right relationships. Relationships which are cultivated and modeled from God as host. Therefore, the church, who finds her identity as both strangers and hosts must ‘love the stranger’ by seeking relevant ways to be hospitable in a polarized world. Patrick Keifert describes the contemporary church as on a road to Emmaus, “We have enjoyed the presence of the Lord but have lost the habit of inviting strangers to dinner or taking up conversations with strangers on the road. We have become so maintenance oriented that we fail to see the mission that is within our door or at least within our neighborhoods.”⁶⁹

Hospitality is critical to the mission of God and is a critical part of the discipleship process. It reflects God’s triune nature and the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Christian discipleship must include the teaching and practice of biblical hospitality in order to fulfill the Great Commission and to love God and our neighbor fully. Moreover, God’s image in humanity will become clearer with hospitality returned to its central position in the Christian community and outreach.

⁶⁸ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: Discipling in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992) 123.

⁶⁹ Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 157.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

*It is ultimately the stranger who shows us who we really are.
The stranger is not just an abstract idea; our conduct toward the stranger
is the measure of our obedience to the command of God.*

Arthur Sutherland¹

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: first, I seek to bring authors who have contributed to the discussion of Christian hospitality together in order to provide insights into the issues surrounding the topic. I selected my authors based on their influence on my thinking and on the weight or uniqueness of their contribution. I have tried to include a wide range of authors from various Christian traditions and disciplines. There will be familiar names brought to the hospitality table, such as, Christine Pohl, Arthur Sutherland, Amy Oden, Parker Palmer, Henri Nouwen, Jacque Derrida, Hans Boersma and John Koenig. And, there will be other authors, perhaps lesser known, who are included because I found their input unique, important or insightful to the discussion.

Secondly, I chose to format this literature review around five significant questions that will serve as platforms for discussion both for this paper and for my class project. These questions are the following:

*What is meant by Christian hospitality?
Why is hospitality a discipleship issue?
What are the barriers to hospitality?
What are the boundaries to hospitality?
How can Christian hospitality be better practiced in the local church?*

¹ Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 28.

Before hearing from our authors, an explanation as to why I chose this format for my literature review is in order. I have chosen not to review each individual work as a annotated whole, but rather, I drew out of their individual works specific insights that addressed what I perceive as the critical questions at hand for my ministerial setting. You will discover many of the authors' quotes interspersed with my attempt to bring forth, where needed, a paraphrase of the author's general intent and context. The goal is to bring together important insights from key contributors in order to provide a platform for discussing the opportunities and challenges facing the church today.

What is meant by Christian hospitality?

This question could also be asked this way, "What makes Christian hospitality Christian?" The question assumes there is a distinct type of hospitality that is uniquely Christian in nature. The vast majority of my author's emphasized the importance of this distinction over and against a generic understanding of hospitality (having friends over for dinner) or universal understanding (all hospitalities are the same). There are aspects of Christian hospitality that are unique from all other forms. The authors made these distinctions known, not only because it was theologically responsible, but because some author's contributions lacked biblical support or decentralized the life and teaching of Jesus Christ in their work.²

² Nanette Sawyer, *Hospitality, The Sacred Art: Discovering the Hidden Spiritual Power of Invitation and Welcome* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths), 2008. The point is not to shy away from controversial or interfaith works, but to limit the discussion to those who either come from a strongly supported biblical worldview or come arguing against such a worldview. Some authors where so far removed from the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* that one would be hard pressed to find any resemblance of a Christ centered work. A case in point is Nanette Sawyer's book, *Hospitality, The Sacred Art*. Sawyer takes an interfaith approach to spiritual formation, recommending works from Zen Buddhism and Hinduism. Her main focus lies on individual's initiative and implementation rather than on reception of Yahweh's gracious gift. The strength of her work lies in her discussion of historic Christian mysticism.

So, what is meant by Christian hospitality? To answer that question, it will be helpful to first determine what Christian hospitality is not. Elizabeth Newman is a great help here.

Newman takes an *apophasic* approach to defining Christian hospitality. By saying what something is *not* we come close to understanding what *is* something's true nature. She attempts to eliminate false possibilities in order to clarify the distortions to hospitality and to provide needed correctives to our speech and actions. Newman lists several misrepresentations.³ Hospitality is not...

1. ...*a private practice*. It is not an activity individually done in solitude. It is always connected, not only with the history of the church and her traditions, but in participation with the betterment of God's mission and society in view.
2. ...*located in a single specific sphere*. Christian hospitality takes place everywhere; in churches, homes, workplaces, bus stops, classrooms, shopping centers and the like. Once it is resigned to one location it is not a way of life.
3. ...*a practice that is without divine judgment*. Any alternative motive for instituting hospitality, such as, growing a church or retaining positions of power or prestige, indicates that the host has not entered into the practice for the good or the *telos* of the practice. For Christians, the internal good of all practices, broadly stated is communion with the triune God. It has an eschatological flavor.
4. ...*a sentimentalized hospitality*. In other words, it is not about politeness. It is not when hospitality embodies a kind of superficial Southern hospitality; if that's the case, it's merely cultural. Sentimentalized hospitality is superficial niceness that does not prevent one from sinning. Sentimental hospitality coincides with a kind of self-blindness and an inability to speak the truth. This is hospitality as entertainment.
5. ...*our achievement* (It is not about having the home in perfect order and entertaining for success), but rather, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the church and the world.
6. ...*an industry*. It is not an activity in order to gain things. It is not cruise line hospitality where the service is wonderful because people get paid and tipped.

³ Newman, 26-28.

For Newman, biblical hospitality is an act of worship that encompasses every aspect of life. It is when the Christian allows their “desires, tastes, and choices to be formed by the drama of God’s grace-filled kingdom” in the center of their lives.⁴ “Worship is hospitality,” Newman writes, “It is the way we participate in God’s own hospitality. If church names our joining together in the household of God, then worship names the way we participate in God’s own hospitality. To the extent that worship is our participation in our triune God’s mutual giving, worship itself is hospitality.”⁵ It is, in fact, a way of seeing. She offers this wonderful and pithy insight: “Our perception enables our reception.”⁶ Arthur Sutherland agrees.

In *I Was a Stranger*, Sutherland emphasized that service only comes after “one is conditioned to seeing.”⁷ In this, Sutherland points to Jesus’ perspective of others. This ability to correctly see is what distinguished Jesus Christ from all others. For example Jesus had perfect vision for the Samaritan woman, Peter’s mother-in-law, the woman with the incurable hemorrhage, the hungry crowds, and the boy with seizures. Sutherland: “In each case, the narratives pause to lay emphasis on the fact that Jesus *saw*. It was sight that moved his will.”⁸ Furthermore, for Sutherland, hospitality enables the host to see themselves through their guests. The guest serves as God’s mirror and shows us who we are.⁹ By practicing hospitality the guest becomes a midwife of our own discipleship – birthing Christlikeness in us. Sutherland also suggests that hospitality is not simply a virtue to be practiced, but it is the fundamental understanding of life and the natural

⁴ Newman, 30.

⁵ Newman, 58.

⁶ Newman, 59.

⁷ Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 78.

⁸ Sutherland, 78.

⁹ Sutherland, 35.

response of all Christians to what Jesus Christ has already done in their lives, “In light of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and return, Christian hospitality is the intentional, responsible, and caring act of welcoming or visiting, in either public or private places, those who are strangers, enemies, or distressed, without regard for reciprocation.”¹⁰

Sutherland writes with the historical injustices of the marginalized in mind. Although he places hospitality within the triune nature of God he argues that at the end of the day, hospitality comes down to an act of the human will. It is an action and actions are dependent on the will.¹¹

John Koenig centers biblical hospitality as one of the moral pillars upon which the cosmos stands and sees it as critical to God’s fulfilled promises and mission. As revealed in Scripture (most notably Matthew 25:31-46), specific views of guests and hosts are overlaid upon the fabric of human life. He provides a simple syllogism: If people love God and God meets us in the stranger, then they shall naturally (and even unconsciously) love God, Jesus, and humanity.¹² But he doesn’t stop there, Koenig states that the Christian needs the stranger, as much as, if not more than, the stranger need the Christian: “We need the stranger,” Koenig adds, “We need the stranger if we are to know Christ and serve God, in truth and in love.”¹³ For this reason, Koenig theologically centers hospitality within Jesus proclamation of the Kingdom of God. It is in the end, a discipleship issue.

Michele Hershberger in *A Christian View of Hospitality* agrees with Sutherland’s emphasis on the human will. “It is a choice,” She writes, “We choose to reject suspicion

¹⁰ Sutherland, xiii.

¹¹ Sutherland, 78.

¹² John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 3.

¹³ Koenig, 65.

as the first reaction to a stranger. We choose to minister alongside others rather than ministering to them. We choose to let go of some of our own control when we meet strangers and when we interact with those we've known for years.”¹⁴

Steve Wilkins in *Face to Face*, reminds his readers that the biblical commands of hospitality are not optional. Loving strangers and neighbors is a command that stems from Israel’s exodus from Egypt (Exod. 22:21; 23:9; Lev. 19:34). God’s people would “show kindness to strangers,” he adds, “in order to show forth (God’s) grace to sinners. All men are strangers to God...” and, “God treats strangers with grace, mercy, and longsuffering; and expected His people to do the same, thus revealing Himself in their daily actions.”¹⁵ Although commands, they are commands given out of God’s grace and based on the gracious nature of God. Hospitality is not, Wilkins adds, a mechanical duty to be done without thinking, but has limits, real threats to the community and safety are always taken into consideration (2nd and 3rd John).¹⁶

There are other authors who expound on transformational nature of Christian hospitality. Fred Bernhard and Steve Clapp see it as an attitude and practice that takes the risk of turning strangers into friends. There is always potential for relationship. Moreover, the stranger is any person or group previously not known.¹⁷ For Henri

¹⁴ Michele Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises* (Scottsdale, PN: Herald Press, 1989), 31.

¹⁵ Steve Wilkins, *Face to Face: Meditations on Friendship and Hospitality* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002), 106. See also, Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands: Building Loving Christian Community – Building Bridges to Friends and Neighbors* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1993).

¹⁶ Wilkins, 106.

¹⁷ Bernhard, Fred & Clapp, Steve. *Widening the Welcome of Your Church: Biblical Hospitality & the Vital Congregation*. 3rd Ed. (Fort Wayne, IN: Brethren Press, 1999), 17.

Nouwen, hospitality takes place when hostility is converted into hospitality. When this happens fearful strangers are transformed into potential friends.¹⁸

Brendan Byrne sees hospitality through the exegetical eye of Luke. According to Byrne, Luke's primary aim for writing his gospel is to assure the identity of God's people as the chosen, set free and those brought into communion with God. Salvation's many benefits include being brought in from the margins of society to a central, honored place within the community of salvation by the hospitality of God. We are people 'under invitation.'¹⁹

Parker Palmer and Bernard Connaughton noted hospitality's role in creating alternative and authentic communities. Palmer expresses the power of hospitality through the means of true community: "Community is that place where the person you least want to live with always lives! And when that person moves away, someone else arises to take his or her place!"²⁰ And, Connaughton shares this quote from a friend, "Hospitality is resistance."²¹ It is subversive and countercultural. This is especially the case when a society has prejudiced particular people. Hospitality swims against the stream of a larger value system.

Hans Boersma in *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross*, centers hospitality in God's reconciliation of the world. Boersma doesn't focus primarily on the individual practices of hospitality but rather he brings two centers of contemporary theological discussion, the Atonement and human hospitality, into contact with each other. Only when the Cross of

¹⁸ Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. (New York, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1975), 47.

¹⁹ Byrne, Brendan. *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*. (Collegeville, IL: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 196-7.

²⁰ Parker Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life*. (New York, NY: Crossway, 1985), 125.

²¹ Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 61.

Christ and hospitable actions of Christians come in contact will hospitality be seen as uniquely Christian and an expression of the very heart of God: “God’s hospitality is like the soil by which the process of reconciliation is able to take root and flourish.”²²

Christine Pohl, a major voice in hospitality scholarship today, provides the final comments on the uniqueness of Christian hospitality. In *Making Room*, Pohl illuminates the distinctiveness of Christian hospitality over and against that of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds where reciprocal obligations were a social expectation. In these ancient cultures, hospitality was offered for personal advantage and emphasized the recipient’s worthiness and goodness rather than their need.²³

In contrast, Pohl argues that the distinctive quality of Christian hospitality lies in its offer of a “generous welcome to the ‘least’, without concern for advantage or benefit of the host. Such hospitality reflects God’s greater hospitality that welcomes the undeserving, provides the lonely with a home, and sets a banquet table for the hungry.”²⁴ Rather than seeking social, economic, or political capital, Christians were deliberately inviting those who seemingly brought little to the table. It was the kindness that was usually reserved for friends and family. But the focus was on the strangers in need, “the lonely and abject,” those “who on first appearance, seemed to have little to offer.”²⁵ It was counter-cultural.

²² Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition*. (Grand Rapids, MI: 2004) pg. 112. Driving home his point, Boersma says, “Divine hospitality must lead to human hospitality,” 85.

²³ Christine Pohl. *Making Room*, 18. See also: Christine Pohl. The Francis Schaeffer Lecture Series 2005 Spring. *Making Room the Mystery: Riches and Challenge of Christian Hospitality*. (Lecture 4) “Hospitality--Making Connects Between Home and Church.” <http://www.covenantseminary.edu/resources/lecture-series/the-francis-schaeffer-lecture-series-2005-spring-making-room-the-mystery-riches-and-challenge-of-christian-hospitality/> (accessed, June 14, 2012).

²⁴ Pohl, 16.

²⁵ Pohl, 19.

In summary, this review of several authors' contributions help provide us with a list of notable distinctive markers of Christian hospitality. All of which are discipleship issues. Christian hospitality is...

1. ...a response to what God has already done for the world.
2. ...an act of service without expectation of receiving in return.
3. ...a worldview and state of 'readiness.'
4. ...spiritually transforming.
5. ...subversive and counter-cultural.
6. ...inclusive. It is seeking out the 'stranger' (those who are not at 'home' in this world).
7. ...a reflection of God's image in this world.
8. ...limited. It has boundaries.
9. ...central to God's redemptive mission in this world.

Why is hospitality a discipleship issue?

At first glance, hospitality does not seem to be part of the discipleship conversation. It may serve nicely in welcoming others but does not appear to fit on the spiritual disciplines' shelf. But writers of hospitality today remind their readers of hospitality's power to transform the disciple of Christ for the sake of the world. Hospitality is one of God's tools for both *discipleship* and *outreach*.

Christian Hospitality's Power to Transform Disciples: Discipleship
“The power of the one life to influence another,” Bill Hull observes in *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, “is the beginning of discipleship.”²⁶ Since definitions

²⁶ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 80.

have never been more important than they are in our current post-modern context, Hull's definition of discipleship is needed. For Hull, disciples are not solely born or made, they are both; a disciple is a "reborn follower of Jesus...they are born to be made."²⁷ They are made to become remade in God's image, yearning to do God's will. But the process of discipleship is pursued in a healthy, biblically centered community.

For Hull and other writers on discipleship, a key component to effective discipleship is committed, authentic relationships. Jim Putman in *Real-life Discipleship* emphasized the relational component of discipleship. For real change to take place in the life of the believer, there must be a highly relational method of making disciples: "We were created with the need for belonging, and if the church is to be relevant, the first need we should meet is this need for community."²⁸

Relationships make the message real: "The church needs relationships, not just because it is the best way to teach but because our relationships are evidence that what we preach is true. God's whole book is about restored relationship with Himself and with others."²⁹ And the onus falls on leadership – more is caught, than taught. What makes a relational environment for discipleship? A healthy, growing environment of shepherding, transparency, accountability, and guided practice: "Relationship by itself is not discipleship. Relationship is a key to discipleship."³⁰ Discipleship includes cultivating a culture and community of relationship development.

Several authors addressed the link between hospitality and discipleship. Accepting the stranger or any other participant in the Christian community is

²⁷Hull, 32.

²⁸ James Putman, *Real-life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 71.

²⁹ Putman, 50.

³⁰ Putman, 60.

foundationally a relational issue. Ultimately, we welcome the outsider to become our friend and walk with us on the road of Christian obedience and maturity.³¹

If the goal of discipleship is to be transformed into God's image then we must see the stranger with Holy Spirit potential to be reconciled to God, to neighbor, and to creation. The spirit of discipleship is a life-giving spirit, as Amy Oden writes: "The spirit that gives life to hospitality is described as encompassing humility and gratitude, arising as a response to God's initiating grace."³²

And if the goal of discipleship is to become fully mature disciples who become disciple makers as Putman and others tell us, then hospitality, again, plays a significant role in this process. Hershberger states that hospitality functions as a person-to-person link that was crucial to the mission of the early church.³³ Ananias and Barnabas took the risk to welcome Saul into the community of faith and became his advocate when the church was understandably 'afraid of him' (Acts 9:26). Hospitality and evangelism are two sides of the same coin. Hershberger: "There is not a work of hospitality and a work of evangelism. There is only one work."³⁴ If the Kingdom was going to be built, it was going to be done so from efforts of both. Hospitality without evangelism exposes our indifference to the person of need. Evangelism without hospitality does the same but goes beyond it in that it exposes our own hypocrisy and idolatry. Hershberger sees the two sides as receptivity and confrontation. She quotes Henri Nouwen: "Receptivity without

³¹ Steve Bernard and Fred Clapp, *Widening the Welcome of Your Church: Biblical Hospitality & the Vital Congregation*. 3rd ed., (Fort Wayne, IN: Brethren Press, 1999), 33.

³² Amy Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Sourcebook of Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 100.

³³ Hershberger, 180.

³⁴ Hershberger, 180.

confrontation leads to bland neutrality that serves nobody. Confrontation without receptivity leads to an oppressive aggression which hurts everybody."³⁵

Christine Pohl stated that when Christians offer hospitality both the recipient and the giver benefits because God is at work transforming both.³⁶ As Christians offer hospitality, God uses that discipline to shape the person in godliness. "Sustained hospitality," Pohl suggests, "exposes our frailties and flaws, and brings us to the end of our self-sufficiency."³⁷ The reciprocal nature of hospitality, particularly when cultivating relationships with the 'least of these,' is transforming. God uses these interactions to reveal our own brokenness and need of healing.

Arthur Sutherland looks at Jesus' life as *the example* to be followed by all Christians (emphasis mine). "How Jesus lived (his person; that is, this divine and human natures)," he writes, "are important because they are the foundation for understanding what Jesus does (his work of redemption). Any attempt to construct a Christology must keep in mind that once Jesus began his mission, there is no indication that he ever stayed under his own roof again. When this is done, it underscores the importance of hospitality for those who would be his disciples."³⁸

Sutherland points out that Jesus' compassion towards others can become our compassion for others (Mark 5:1-20; Matt. 23:14). His generosity welcomes the despised to eat bread with him (Lk. 19:1-10). He shows empathy for the imprisoned (Matt. 5:21-26; 18:29-31). He teaches on clothing for the poor (Matt. 5.40) and he himself loses his

³⁵ Hershberger, 183.

³⁶ Christine Pohl, The Francis Schaeffer Lecture Series 2005 Spring. *Making Room the Mystery: Riches and Challenge of Christian Hospitality* (Lecture 3) "Hospitality Proper--Truth and Errors." "Hospitality Proper--Truth and Errors." <http://www.covenantseminary.edu/resources/lecture-series/the-francis-schaeffer-lecture-series-2005-spring-making-room-the-mystery-riches-and-challenge-of-christian-hospitality/> (accessed, June 14, 2012). See also, Parker Palmer, *A Company of Strangers*, 125.

³⁷ Pohl, (Lecture 3).

³⁸ Sutherland, 2.

own clothing as ‘they stripped him’ (Matt. 27.28) and ‘divided his clothes among them’ (Mark 15.24). He has compassion on the hungry and thirsty (Matt. 15.32, John 19:28). These experiences of Jesus are important because Jesus is not depicted as just saying the words of Matthew 25:34-36, “I was a stranger and you invited me in,” but Jesus actually experienced what it means to be marginalized in every way.”³⁹ To identify with Jesus in discipleship includes seeing the link between Christology and hospitality.⁴⁰ Jesus’ compassion for others can become the disciple’s empathy for others.

M. Therese Lysaught sees the image of God sustained through discipleship and hospitality together. She writes, “Discipleship is a lifelong journey, a ‘process of reconfiguration,’ and an ‘ongoing activity, requiring vigilance to resist the atrophy that comes with the disuse as well as to resist those powers that would reconfigure us differently.’”⁴¹ Newman adds that Christian hospitality, “rightly understood and practiced...gives us a vigilant place to stand to see how easily various cultural assumptions and practices can distort our lives. Free of such distortions, we can begin to see how hospitality is a practice at once liturgical, economic, and ethical and political.”⁴² It is, in short, a practice that challenges every aspect of our being. Newman exhorts Christians to think of hospitality as a “vigilant practice” that assists the Christian in remaining alert to the degenerative pull into “unfaithfulness.”⁴³ Hospitality is an act of “resistance in order to be genuine.”⁴⁴ This is the discipleship that Michael Wilkins

³⁹ Sutherland, 2.

⁴⁰ See also, Paul E. White, *Hospitality Reflected in the Ministry of Jesus as Context for Contemporary Evangelism* (DMin Thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, May, 2007), 14-16.

⁴¹ M. Therese Lysaught, “Eucharist as Basic Training,” in *Theology and Lived Christianity*, ed., David M. Hammond, (Mystic, CT: Twenty-third, 2000), 265.

⁴² Newman, 73.

⁴³ Newman, 73.

⁴⁴ Newman, 74.

describes as “comprehensive,”⁴⁵ and Christine Pohl calls “a way of life” that is “cultivated over a lifetime.”⁴⁶

Christian Hospitality’s Power to Transform the World

Ajith Fernando wrote in *The Christian’s Attitude toward World Religions*, “In different cultures, different methods are important.”⁴⁷ For example, the Apostle Paul used the words of Epimenides the Cretan to communicate in the language of the Athenians the gospel (Acts 17:28). Contextualization is key. Jim Henderson said that today’s culture requires the method of creating and defending space for others.⁴⁸ In this way, outreach is to love one’s neighbor and not treating them as objects to be won. This is speaking to the Greeks in Greek. Putman elaborates, “Being a missional follower of Jesus means offering the disconnected a place to belong, understanding that belonging can be a significant step toward believing.”⁴⁹ Christine Pohl agrees:

Today, our situation is surprisingly similar to the early Christian context in which the normative understandings and practices of hospitality were developed (done for personal advantage). We also find ourselves in a fragmented and multicultural society that yearns for relationships, identity, and meaning. Our mobile and self-oriented society is characterized by disturbing levels of loneliness, alienation, and estrangement. In a culture that appears at times to be overtly hostile to life itself, those who reject violence and embrace life bear powerful witness.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Michael J. Wilkens, *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 299.

⁴⁶ Christine Pohl, “Hospitality, a practice and a way of life,” *Vision*, (Winnipeg, Man: Spring, 2002), 3 no. 1, 37.

⁴⁷ Fernando: “Contextualization must be distinguished from syncretism. Syncretism takes place when, in the presentation and outworking of Christianity, elements essential to the gospel are dropped or elements in compatible with the gospel are taken on in the efforts to identify with non-Christians...Paul’s message was in the end what it has always been - the centrality of Jesus as proved by the Resurrection, and the need to repent and make Christ Lord.” Ajith, Fernando, *The Christian’s Attitude Toward World Religions: Responding To The Idea That Christianity Is Just Another Religion*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale.1988), 35.

⁴⁸ “Defending space means we protect our relationships with non-Christians. They are real people to us, not targets.” Henderson, Jim & Casper, Matthew. *Jim & Casper Go To Church: Frank Conversation about faith, churches, and well-meaning Christians*. (Carol Stream, IN: Tyndale. 2007), xxx, xxxv.

⁴⁹ Putman, 71.

⁵⁰ Pohl, 35.

The lonely, alienated and estranged in this world and in whom the church is to witness are identified as Christ coming into their midst. A central text understandably noted by the vast majority of the selected authors is Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus' Parable of the Sheep and Goats. Christ so identifies himself with the 'least' and the marginalized that the 'stranger' takes on divine implications. Hospitality is key to Christian global evangelism because it gives outreach integrity; it is, according to Hershberger, the part of evangelism that says to the stranger, "Welcome, you're home."⁵¹

Mortimer Arias points out that hospitality has been neglected in missional circles even though its practice covers the biblical story.⁵² For example, Arias cites the Apostle Paul: "Receive one another as Christ received you, in order to bring praise to God" (Rom. 15:7). Arias provides a succinct but thorough biblical description of hospitality's role in world evangelism and concludes that this method of reaching the world needs to be emphasized today. "How hospitable are our churches? This amounts to asking, how evangelistic are they?"⁵³

Another question raised by Arias refers to the possibility of missing missional opportunities because strategists might be overly focused at the wrong direction. Christian mission in the west is usually thought of as 'going' not 'coming.' "It is one thing to go 'out there' and tell the people 'the old, old story,'" Arias adds, "it is another to bring them here and show them how Christians live."⁵⁴ The question is a relevant one for

⁵¹ Hershberger, 175.

⁵² Mortimer Arias, "Centripetal Mission or Evangelization by Hospitality," *Missiology: An International Review*, 10, no. 1, (January, 1982), 70-81.

⁵³ Arias, 71-72.

⁵⁴ Arias, 79.

local church mission: how do we not only reach the unreached but also receive those who are coming to us. How do we “testify authentically to the overreached?”⁵⁵

In summary, the authors have stated that hospitality is interwoven into the framework of discipleship through the life and practice of Jesus Christ and the early Christians. It centers on the value of bridging relationships and value of even the most insignificant in the eyes of the world. When Jesus’ hospitality is done Jesus’ way, the Spirit’s power to continually transform Christians into the Christ’s image and to transform those not yet convinced of the Lordship of Jesus Christ for the first time, is unleashed.

What are the barriers to hospitality?

Although many Christians actively participate in biblical hospitality, there are many who do not. So, what keeps so many Christians from reflecting biblical hospitality in the church and in the world? There are barriers erected hindering genuine hospitality. Like the barrier to health that malnutrition brings to the human body because of the body’s deprivation of some nutrients, so is the presence of barriers to Christian hospitality exist due to a *lacking* within the life of the Christian community. The authors identified several areas of hospitable privation:

Lack of Heart

Paul Stevens in *Seven Days of Faith*, said that in many cases the real hindrance to hospitality is the distance between the heart of a Christian and the poor.⁵⁶ Stevens added that the lack of proximity to the poor from zoning bylaws in modern cities and separate

⁵⁵ Arias, 77. For an excellent historical recounting of hospitality as evangelism see also, George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 47-75.

⁵⁶ R. Paul Stevens, *Seven Days of Faith: Every Day Alive with God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2001), 178.

suburbs, separated people not only by neighborhoods, but by compassion. Out of sight; out of heart. Even if they are next-door neighbors, there can still be a distance that cannot be measured by fence lines. Stevens refers to Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31) as an example of how proximity didn't keep the rich man from befriending the poor. Many years earlier, John Wesley spoke on the Christian's heart for the poor:

One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that according to the common observation one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know: they keep out of the way of knowing it - and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart.⁵⁷

Steven's also mentioned that compassion for one's neighbor may be supplanted by one's anger. Citing Jonah's refusal to rejoice in God's conversion of the Ninevites; it is possible that anger directed towards historical enemies or others' lifestyles prevents Christians from caring. Jonah is a story of God capturing reluctant missionaries.⁵⁸ It is about transforming the heart to make it more than hospitable.

But lacking heart may not flow from compassion deprivation, but rather, a simple lack of energy. Sutherland says that many Christian's do not invest in hospitality because of they are simply stretched too thin: "Hospitality, public and private, is under attack from all sides. The term 'compassion fatigue' has made its way into our lexicon of societal ills."⁵⁹ Hospitality requires the conscious and committed effort to be our 'brother's keeper.'⁶⁰ There is a cost to be paid in discipleship and hospitality; it is the cost

⁵⁷ Wesley, *Works of John Wesley*, 3: Sermon 98: "On Visiting the Sick," (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986), 387-88.

⁵⁸ Stevens, 200.

⁵⁹ Sutherland, ix.

⁶⁰ Sutherland, x.

of commitment to the commands of God to pursue hospitality without grumbling (1 Pet. 4:9).

Lack of Sight

A common question addressed in the literature review was, if hospitality was so emphasized in the Bible and the early church why has it not found a solid footing in the church today?⁶¹ One of the reasons hospitality has lost footing in the contemporary church is that many Christians have become myopic. Stevens calls it “tragic” when Christians fail to recognize the ‘stranger’ in their midst.⁶² Whether that stranger turns out to be “a fellow church member, work peer, next-door-neighbor, or even a member of one’s own family; hospitality is not an event seen as a leisure time, but something “seven days a week.”⁶³

Our authors repeatedly suggested that some Christians don’t recognize the ‘stranger’ before them because they themselves have become blind to their own ‘stranger’ status in this world (1 Pet. 1:1). Not seeing the ‘stranger’ before them is a failure to recognize Jesus in every ‘stranger’ that “distorts Christian community and inclines hosts to “try to calculate the importance of one guest over another.”⁶⁴

Lack of Space

Sutherland suggests that the elimination of the ‘city gate,’ that place in the past where strangers gather in a city prepared to be welcomed has been replaced by the development of political and civil institutions that care for the marginalized. Seeing the

⁶¹ Pohl asks, “If hospitality to strangers was such an important part of Christian life, how did it virtually disappear?” Pohl, 7.

⁶² Stevens, 186.

⁶³ Stevens, 186.

⁶⁴ Pohl, 68.

space for the marginalized in state programs or county clinics alone blinds the Christian to their God given responsibility. Sutherland:

The most ‘pernicious’ factor is the oldest of all: hospitality requires a conscious effort to be ‘your brother’s keeper.’ As a consequence, we often overlook the fact that being our brother’s keeper requires that we give attention to the physical space that we share with others. Hospitality is the caring for that shared space. The hospitable person is making the assertion that when we live or meet together in that space, sometimes permanently and sometimes only momentarily, we strive to keep that space, whether public or private, inviting and welcoming. This is hard to do.⁶⁵

Creating space for the ‘stranger’ takes all of our resources: time, energy, money, emotions, will, and thinking. It is a worldview of the church that is, in Newman’s words, both *oikos* (home) and *polis* (public).⁶⁶ The church is not to be a safe place, secluded from others like so many homes are perceived. The church is both home and public and it’s going to get messy, like our homes. The barrier here lies in our desire for a “domesticated hospitality where religion belongs in the private sphere (home) in contrast to the public sphere (city) where economics, politics, and science are exchanged.”⁶⁷

Parker Palmer defines community as “that place where the person you least want to live with always lives!” and he added, “And when that person moves away, someone else arises to take his or her place!”⁶⁸ This is the space needed for biblical hospitality to take root. Henri Nouwen suggests that creating space is the essence of hospitality, where freedom is offered and friendships are made:

Hospitality...means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to

⁶⁵ Sutherland, x.

⁶⁶ Newman, 39.

⁶⁷ Neman, 39.

⁶⁸ Palmer, 124.

offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines...The paradox of hospitality is that it wants to create emptiness, not a fearful emptiness, but a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free; free to sing their own songs, speak their own language, dance their own dances; free also to leave and follow other vocations.⁶⁹

But it is this free space that serves as a barrier to hospitality. Becoming an inclusive community brings strangers into the community. John Koenig, reminds the church, however, that the synoptic gospels show Jesus challenging exclusivism wherever it was officially sanctioned or accepted as normal; Jesus' disciples were a "company of strangers" and it would have been a "major effort for them to welcome one another."⁷⁰

Lack of Faith

Another barrier to Christian hospitality is a lack of faith. The authors presented many reasons to be cautious with strangers. But they also mentioned that fear has blinded many Christians and they simply lack faith in God's sovereignty in the matter. Sutherland points to significant social issues that have cast the stranger in a threatening light; in the advent of 9/11, crime rates, life in a litigation society hinders acting hospitable to those we do not know. Personal security and protection from the stranger is big business today.⁷¹ Moving a stranger across one's threshold requires both faith and discernment. According to Margaret Visser in *The Rituals of Dinner*, the acceptance of an outsider into one's house can be an invitation to what many cultures would call a temporary "pollution," which means something is out of place.⁷² But yet we are called to welcome that which seems "out of place and which may create apprehension. Visser measures the

⁶⁹ Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 50-51. For the transformative potential of space and inclusion see George Hunter III, *Celtic Way of Evangelism*.

⁷⁰ Koenig, 20, 31.

⁷¹ Sutherland, 15.

⁷² Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origins, Evolution, and Eccentricities, and Meaning of Table Manners*. (Toronto, ON: HarperCollins, 1991), 125.

status of a guest somewhere between a hostile foreigner and a family member: “‘Guesthood’ is an artificially created ritual role, participation in both extremes; hence its ambiguity and need for care in its regulation.”⁷³

Hershberger points towards the human tendency to deal only with those who are like us and tend to grow afraid of those who are different, afraid of the “hidden threats which ‘otherness’ seems to contain.”⁷⁴ Stereotypes and fantasies about the stranger diminish with human interaction where people share a common humanity; and our devilish views of the stranger evaporate and drift away.

Victor Matthews derived from the Old Testament understanding of hospitality seven codes of conduct that together seek to maintain the honor of persons, households, and communities through the practice of receiving the stranger in hospitable ways. Among the seven codes was the code of transforming the stranger from potential threat to becoming an ally.⁷⁵

This transformation was not limited to ancient Palestine. Sutherland mentions that in ancient Rome, citizens were xenophobic. Strangers were viewed as having magical powers that could be used as weapons; individual hospitality was a means of disarming the stranger and warding off evil. There is a lesson here for us today.⁷⁶ Lacking faith to invite strangers into a Christian’s life potentially sustains evil and perpetuates an unreasonable stereotype of strangers as potential threats rather than potential friends.

⁷³ Visser, 125. For another voice on the use of discernment with strangers see, Steve Wilkins, *Face to Face*, 107.

⁷⁴ Hershberger, 41.

⁷⁵ Victor H. Matthews, “Hospitality and Hostility in Judges 4.” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* , 21(1991), 13-15.

⁷⁶ Sutherland, 15.

Lack of Understanding

Many people simply don't understand what genuine Christian hospitality looks like so they don't pursue it or they pursue a distortion of it. Christine Pohl suggests three reasons people don't appreciate hospitality in the church today.⁷⁷ First, Christian hospitality gets lost in the Christian jargon floating around in the church sometimes reducing it to entertainment.⁷⁸ There are bits of it that people speak of but it is not valued as central to the church. There are hospitality teams and people that make coffee; there are home group hosts and people that serve in the community, but how it all interconnects with God's grand narrative is missed.

Secondly, sometimes hospitality appears boring. It's about small caring acts, meals without gratitude, picking up after others, and there are other things more enjoyable. It's a strange mixture of "very ordinary acts of caring" but it carries with it "the promise of God's presence."⁷⁹ Thirdly, Pohl sees another barrier erected in people's tendency to view hospitality as a tool; it is used primarily to benefit the host. When it is singularly an outreach strategy for church growth, hospitality can depersonalize and objective people. When hospitality is reduced to a task it becomes far removed from the grace-filled practice found in Scripture. Newman adds that Christians tend to focus on the large-scale success strategies thereby missing the small gestures that is the DNA of faithful hospitality. "If hospitality is our participation in God's own giving and

⁷⁷ Pohl, (Lecture no.3).

⁷⁸ Sutherland: "It resists the popular idea that hospitality is similar to 'entertaining.' Sutherland points out the story of *Beauty and the Beast* and how that story helps children confront their natural fear of strangers and helps them imagine the moral consequences of adopting a worldview that give primacy to loathing, fear, and dread. Did this lesson get lost when Disney's *Be Our Guest* signature song became the subsequent advertising campaign for its hotels. At that point, 'being our guest' became synonymous with having a good time. The impression is that hospitality toward guest means chasing away frowns, chirping about sunshine and churning out glee by the gallon." Sutherland, xiv-xv.

⁷⁹ Pohl, Lecture (Lecture no. 3).

receiving,” Newman summarizes, “then as scripture testifies, this gift and reception is always particular, concrete, and seemingly insignificant.”⁸⁰

Elizabeth Newman talks of the gap between participating in God’s hospitality and our consumer culture. Consumption that dominates our culture is at odds with the giving and receiving that constitutes the life of God. “In theory,” according to Newman, “the kind of Christ-centered hospitality described in this book may sound intriguing; in practice, the obstacle can seem paralyzing.”⁸¹ Lack of understanding hinders Christian hospitality.

Lack of Obedience

Another reason Christians don’t practice hospitality is because they simply see it as optional or the responsibility of leadership. Alexander Strauch emphasized the commands of hospitality (Rom. 12:13a; 1 Pet. 4:9; Hebrews 13:2a; 3 John 8; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:10) over and against the various excuses Christians make in order to avoid hospitality. He highlights Paul’s words, “pursue hospitality” (Rom. 12:13a), and helpfully places them with Paul’s preceding words: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:1,2). Hospitality is a command of God and to not pursue it is disobedience and ends up conforming the disciple into an indifferent or fearful stranger. In this sense, conforming to the world is to use hospitality to protect one’s power in this world⁸² or to neglect the practice altogether for the sake of

⁸⁰ Newman, 174.

⁸¹ Newman, 173.

⁸² Pohl (Lecture no. 3): “Those we are hospitable towards are those who help us maintain our comfort, power and status. There is power in recognition; power to convert the host to one that identifies and empathizes with the guest.” 3rd lecture. Anthony J. Gittins, “Beyond Hospitality? *The Missionary Status and Role Revisited*,” *International Review of Mission*, 83, no. 33 (July, 1994), 399. See also Newman, 19.

personal convenience.⁸³ The world's hospitality is self-serving. "We think too little of responsibility," Sutherland adds, "and too much of reciprocity."⁸⁴ Lack of obedience leads the Christian away from strangers and towards a deeper entrenchment towards fulfilling God's will in one's life.

Where are the Boundaries of Hospitality?

Amongst scholars today, the topic of hospitality boundaries overshadow all other issues on hospitality. Questions arise. How inclusive is Christian hospitality? Are there limits to the welcome, and if so, where are they? It is difficult to bring these writers' conversations together without mentioning the name that lives in the footnotes of most of their writings: Jacque Derrida. Derrida's literary and philosophical work on 'pure hospitality' has influenced much of the church in regards to the boundaries of hospitality.

Jacque Derrida

Derrida is considered by many to be the father of *deconstruction*: the practice of taking apart a piece of writing to show how, in spite of itself, it fails to produce the consistent, reliable sense it aims at. Derrida contended that meaning is never stable because it tries in vain to refer outside itself. Derrida attempted to 'un-close,' as much as possible, the thought of thinking itself – in order to open the link as wide as possible, open it to every single other, to any other whatsoever. Structures (literary, economic, political, religious, or otherwise) that organize one's experience "is constituted and maintained by the act of exclusion."⁸⁵ In the act of creating something, something else gets left out. In regards to religion, Derrida perused the history of various faiths and he

⁸³ Matthew Carroll, "A Biblical Approach to Hospitality," *Review and Expositor*, 108 (Fall, 2011), 521.

⁸⁴ Sutherland, xv.

⁸⁵ Mark C. Taylor, *What Derrida Really Meant*.

<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/derrida/taylorderrida.html> (Accessed: January 21, 2013).

surmised that the future must be pursued with a religious hospitality without limits. He advocated for what he called, “unconditional” or “pure” hospitality.⁸⁶ Derrida:

I must be unprepared, or prepared to be unprepared, for the unexpected arrival of *any* other. Is this possible? I don't know. If, however, there is pure hospitality, or a pure gift, it should consist in this opening without horizon, without horizon of expectation, an opening to the newcomer whoever that may be. It may be terrible because the newcomer may be a good person, or may be the devil; but if you exclude the possibility that the newcomer is coming to destroy your house – if you want to control this and exclude in advance this possibility – there is no hospitality.⁸⁷

Derrida and other writers in his philosophical camp influenced many in the church on how people read and measure the Bible and to what level and in what manner the Bible is to be understood as authoritative in contemporary society.⁸⁸ For Derrida, it is the “worst violence” to exclude anyone from the religious community. Exclusion then, is an act of violence and God is not evil, therefore, God desires to include all to his limitless hospitality.

There are many scholars, writers, and pastors that have taken Derrida’s vision and have massaged it to their own liking.⁸⁹ Although not fully contributed to Derrida, his indirect influence on the controversial topic of homosexual acceptance in the church can

⁸⁶ Brian Russell, "Developing Derrida: Pointers to Faith, Hope and Prayer", *Theology*, 104, no. 822. (November-December, 2001), 406.

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley. (London: Routledge, 1999), 70.

⁸⁸ For a favorable view of Derrida’s influence within the contemporary evangelical church see, Crystal Downing, *The Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2012). See also, Claudio Carvalhaes, “Borders, Globalization and Eucharistic Hospitality,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 49, no. 1 (Spring 2010, March), 45-55.

⁸⁹ For example, see: John Blevins. "Hospitality is a Queer Thing," *Journal of Pastoral Theology*. 19, no. 2, (Winter, 2009), 104-117. And, Claudio Carvalhaes, “Borders, Globalization and Eucharistic Hospitality,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 49, no. 1 (Spring 2010, March), 45-55.

find at least some streams flowing from his writing.⁹⁰ Henry Brinton, in his otherwise helpful book, *The Welcoming Congregation*, argues at one point for an evolving interpretation and application of Scripture and when it comes to hospitality, exhorts the church: “Don’t judge. Just don’t.”⁹¹ Although he doesn’t follow Derrida in accepting an unlimited hospitality,⁹² he calls readers to stay true to the Christian witness while also opening your congregation to all people. Staying “true to the Christian witness” means having a hard center (“grounded in God”) and a soft exterior (“open to all”).⁹³ But Brinton does not equate God’s grounding with confronting homosexual behavior in the church.

What is a common hermeneutical approach by Brinton and others is to argue for an ever widening trajectory of acceptance dictated in the Bible.⁹⁴ As the biblical narrative continues so does the inclusion of previously excluded people groups, exemplifying a hermeneutic that begins with a core belief in the Bible but also affirms that God is leading the church into new understandings about what it means to be good and faithful people today.⁹⁵ Letty Russell, a feminist theologian, helps readers develop hermeneutical strategies for avoiding “textual harassment” by traditionalists.⁹⁶ Derrida exhorted others to pursue a “pure” hospitality, one that is wide open and without barriers. Some Christians followed, others are more cautious.

⁹⁰ For a thorough, clear and traditional evangelical response to the topic of homosexuality in the church see, Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001).

⁹¹ Brinton, 106.

⁹² “If a church works too hard at being acceptable to everyone, it will end up not standing for anything in particular. There is no virtue in throwing out core beliefs and practices in the quest for complete inclusiveness.” Henry G. Brinton, 106.

⁹³ Brinton, xv.

⁹⁴ For example: John Patrick Colatch. *Welcoming the Stranger: Practices of Hospitality as a Prophetic Witness to Gay and Lesbian Persons in the United Methodist Church*, (DMin. Thesis, Rochester, NY: March 7, 2003).

⁹⁵ Brinton, xvi, 102.

⁹⁶ Russell, 89.

Disagreeing with Derrida (and others)

Thomas Reynolds disagrees with Derrida's notion of blindly surrender one's boundaries, and thus, one's identity; resulting in being swept away by the stranger's sense of difference. According to Reynolds, Derrida is exhorting the church to "give up the household."⁹⁷ William Cavarnaugh says it this way: "The world has absorbed the church into itself," and the church's identity as a "contrast" society is lost.⁹⁸

Caroline Westerhoff in *Good Fences*, stated that boundaries "separate and define us so that we *can* be together (emphasis mine).⁹⁹ She continues by describing the damaging and invasive reality of a borderless hospitality:

"Lack of definition about who we are – about our personal and communal limits – presents us with undesirable and destructive ambiguity...when I have no boundaries for myself, I will intend to invade yours. When you have none, you will encroach upon mine. Wholesome connections only becomes possible when two people – or two groups – know who they are and who they are not, what they bring to the relationship and what they do no, what they seek from it and what they might want to avoid."¹⁰⁰

Douglas Jacobsen noted the essential position of hospitality in the church but says it's not enough by itself. Hospitality by itself is "not a sufficient guide for Christian life

⁹⁷ "Giving up one's identity in order to attend to another forfeits the resources for welcoming and caring for another, namely, have a place, a home. It also mitigates the capacity to resist those who would violate or take advantage of the host. This undercuts genuine hospitality as much as does the opposite extreme – that is, receiving the guest in a condescending, paternalistic manner that nurtures the host's pretense to power and the guest's sense of dependence or, worse still, demands the guest forfeit his or her own identity and assimilate to the established household routine. Hospitality traffics neither in indeterminate self-abandonment nor in controlling self-preoccupation." Thomas E. Reynolds, "Welcoming without Reserve? A Case in Christian Hospitality," *Theology Today*, 63, (2006), 198. For haunting images of divine exclusion depicted in terms of God's ultimate inhospitality, see also, Amy Plantinga Pauw's and her exegesis of Isa. 25:10-12, 65:13; Psalm 23:5; Zeph. 1:7, Matt, 22:13, Luke 1:53 and Rev. 19:17-21. Amy Pauw, 13-16. For a hospitable view of 3rd John, see, Barth L. Campbell. "Honor, hospitality and haughtiness: the contention for leadership in 3 John." *Evangelical Quarterly*, 77.4 (2005) 321-341.

⁹⁸ William Cavarnaugh, "Torture is a Moral Issue," *Torture and Eucharist: A Regretful Update*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 180.

⁹⁹ Caroline Westerhoff, *Good Fences: The Boundaries of Hospitality*. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1999), 53.

¹⁰⁰ Westerhoff, 56.

and practice. It is essential, but it is not the whole story.”¹⁰¹ Any one thing taken to an extreme is foolhardy. Blaise Pascal in *Pensees* is helpful here pointing out that any virtue, no matter how good, such as hospitality in this case, if taken to an extreme, is detrimental. For example, both frugality and generosity can be virtues but if one is taken to an extreme it can be a detrimental. They need one another and both are needed. Pascal offers this timeless reminder, “I do not admire the excess of some one virtue in a person unless I am shown at the same time the excess of the opposite virtue. A person does not prove his or her greatness by standing at an extremity, but by touching both extremities at once and filling all that lies between them.”¹⁰²

Newman pushes back on the notion of diversity for diversity sake. In today’s jargon, she explains, “hospitality” is used interchangeably with “welcoming diversity,” such that calling “diversity” into question is seen as being “inhospitable.” To be “hospitable,” this position assumes, is to be “inclusive.”¹⁰³ Radical inclusivity undermines worship and “any meaningful distinction between the church and the world. Jesus did not say “Be inclusive;” he said, “follow me.”¹⁰⁴ Christian hospitality disappears when the distinction between church and world disappears. Hospitality for Newman is located in the *oikos* (home); that is, Christian hospitality must have a home, a center. Without a home, hospitality is an oxymoron.¹⁰⁵ A totally open space is not a human space and cannot create a “coming-together” for humans to speak, act, and cooperate.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Douglas Jacobsen, "Hospitality and Holiness." *Prism*, 22 no 2 (Fall 2008), 55.

¹⁰² Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1966), 243.

¹⁰³ Newman, 31.

¹⁰⁴ Newman, 43.

¹⁰⁵ Newman, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Newman, 53.

Pohl also focuses on the importance of the *oikos* as a place where hospitality flourishes. Referencing the influence of Derrida and other's radical welcome, Phol notes, "By stripping us of particular traditions, locales, and authorities, and by substituting the free and universal self, it has left the actual self bereft, subject to political and economic forces that it is often hopeless to resist. "'Nonplaces' easily dominate our lives."¹⁰⁷ What is beneficial to both the host and the guest is Christian hospitality. When both host and guest reciprocate in an *oikos*, holiness flourishes.¹⁰⁸

Boersma points towards Jesus' Incarnation and the cross as examples of God's own acceptance of limitations to hospitality. "God needs to set boundaries," Boersma adds, "precisely in the name of boundaries."¹⁰⁹ His challenge to Derrida challenges the rationale that would unleash violence in the name of restricting violence. "Hospitality is an art that is impossible to practice when we refuse to challenge evil," Boersma writes, "When Derrida pleads for an absolute or 'pure hospitality' in which the stranger 'may be a good person, or may be the devil,' he knowingly runs the danger of giving violence and injustice free reign."¹¹⁰

Because something is exclusive does not mean it is not loving or morally wrong. The key for Boersma lies in the mind and heart of the person performing the violent act of exclusion. Is the goal of the violence to lessen violence?¹¹¹ This is the mind and heart of God in the cross of Christ. To see the cross is to see God's hospitality despite the presence also of divine violence.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Pohl, Lecture 3.

¹⁰⁸ Pohl, Lecture 3.

¹⁰⁹ Boersma, 53.

¹¹⁰ Boersma, 36.

¹¹¹ Boersma, 47.

¹¹² Boersma, 51.

A final push back to Derrida comes from George Carey, once Archbishop of Canterbury. He rebuffs the notion of universal acceptance of outsiders on the basis of the particularity of Christ and his cross.¹¹³ Jesus is not just a ‘contribution to the religious quest of humanity,’ but rather, “he is described in the most ‘absolute’ terms: He is the *only* teacher (Matt. 23:10), the *only* Lord (Eph. 4:5), the *only* shepherd (John 10:16), the *only* mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), the *only* high priest (Heb. 9:11; 10:10-14). Salvation is found in *no-one* else (Acts 4:12); Jesus’ name is above *all* other names (Phil. 2:9-11).”¹¹⁴

In summary, God has called his church to be both hospitable to outsiders and to be holy, a people ‘set apart’ for God and his mission in the world. There will always be a tension with where the boundary lines are drawn with the church. Derrida’s “pure hospitality” fails to maintain God’s holiness. Boundary lines will serve as walls that identify the church as a “contrast society” and have wide doors with well-oiled hinges that invite others around the pursuit of holiness according to God’s Word. How one interprets that Word is critical in determining where the fence posts are dug. But a further question needs to be addressed; how do we sustain boundaries while also welcoming strangers?

Perhaps the clearest description of Christian boundaries comes from Henry Cloud and John Townsend. Based on the personhood of God, they remark:

The concept of boundaries comes from the very nature of God. God defines himself as a distinct, separate being, and he is responsible for himself. He defines and takes responsibility for his personality by telling us what he thinks, feels, plans, allows, will not allow, likes, and dislikes.

He also defines himself as separate from his creation and from us. He differentiates himself from others. He tells us who he is and who he is not. For example, he says that he is love and that he is not darkness (1 John 4:16; 1:6).

¹¹³ George Carey, *The Gate of Glory*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 215-18.

¹¹⁴ Carey, 218.

In addition, he has boundaries within the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one, but at the same time they are distinct persons with their own boundaries. Each one has his own personhood and responsibilities, as well as a connection and love for one another (John 17:24).

God also limits what he will allow in his yard. He confronts sin and allows consequences for behavior. He guards his house and will not allow evil things to go on there. He invites people in who will love him, and he lets his love flow outward to them at the same time. The “gates” of his boundaries open and close appropriately...boundaries are anything that helps to differentiate you from someone else, or shows where you begin and end.¹¹⁵

But pinpointing the boundaries of the church and her welcome is not as concrete and clear as one might first imagine. George Ladd reminds us that the Kingdom of God – God’s dynamic rule, present in the mission of Jesus – creates the church.¹¹⁶ The church is the ἐκκλησία (the “called out ones”) on whom the community of faith rests and is distinguished (Matt. 16:18; 18:17). But the church, although distinct in faith will always have mixed company if it is pursuing God’s mission. Ladd refers to Jesus’ parables of *The Wheat and Tares* (Matt. 13:25-30) and *The Net* (Matt. 13:47-50) as evidence that good seed are gathered with bad; good fish are gather with bad; the accepted and rejected will always be in proximity until the final threshing.¹¹⁷ Jesus exhorted his followers to keep their eyes on the Great Commission.

And if the goal of discipleship is for a community of faith to maintain godliness and hospitality simultaneously then a very important question is raised by the writers - where then are the boundaries of hospitality? The very height and breadth of God’s gracious and generous act of hospitality in the giving of his Son on the cross makes it

¹¹⁵ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No To Take Control of Your Life*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 35.

¹¹⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 110.

¹¹⁷ George Ladd, 110.

difficult to assess. How gracious and generous is the church to be? What does it look like to protect community identity as the Apostle John did in 2nd and 3rd John? Where is the fence line? What is the response to absolute, unlimited hospitality?

For Boersma, the church is God's community of reconciliation and the presence of Christ in the world, and when everyone is admitted without discernment, hospitality itself has lost its character. To invite the 'devil' as Derrida suggests, is to invite the destruction of lives and homes.¹¹⁸ Boundaries, like truth, are violent places but they exist for the eschatological goal of pure hospitality. They are by nature exclusive. Boersma suggests four markers that help forge authentic Christian community:¹¹⁹

1. *Baptismal Hospitality* (212-): baptism is the sign of those who have received God's forgiveness.
2. *Eucharistic Hospitality* (215-): the horizontal justification of hospitality at the communion table has a basis in a prior vertical relationship with God (216). But often times God's boundaries are troublesome only to those who refuse to accept the hospitality of God (218).
3. *Penitential Hospitality* (222-): confession of sin, more than any other form of hospitality reveals that divine hospitality is not without its boundaries (222). Without confession we remain 'strangers,' exiled from the community of reconciliation because of a willful and persistent refusal to confess sin.¹²⁰
4. *Cruciform Hospitality* (228-234): participating in the sufferings of Christ (Col. 1:24) for the redemptive purposes of God in this world.

Pohl states that the church has a lot at stake in the challenge to maintain distinctions while avoiding "differences to be translated into liabilities."¹²¹ The challenge is to welcome strangers into a distinct community without coercing them into conformity while keeping their well-being intact even though they may not share similar values. Pohl

¹¹⁸ Boersma, 223.

¹¹⁹ Boersma, 208-234.

¹²⁰ See also, Barth Campbell, "Honor, Hospitality and Haughtiness: The Contention for Leadership in 3 John," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 77.4 (2005), 335-36.

¹²¹ Pohl, 82.

acknowledges the tension is trying to identify concrete markers for boundaries, but she did emphasize their critical importance and pointed towards the maintaining of the Christian's identity with the stranger when practicing hospitality. "The practice of hospitality challenges the boundaries of a community," she states, "while it simultaneously depends on that community's identity to make a space that nourishes life."¹²²

For Bernard and Clapp, an important church boundary is to maintain and support the position of Scripture as authoritative. They write that the Bible promotes a welcome for all people. Included in that welcome is a robust demographic list, including the gay population. They add, however, "...welcoming a person is not synonymous with accepting all aspects of this lifestyle or behavior. It is important to link the act of hospitality with the call to discipleship. Ultimately, we welcome the outsider to walk with us on the road of Christian obedience and faithfulness."¹²³ Jacobsen agrees: "Everyone is welcomed, but that welcome is an invitation to change. It is an invitation to undertake a newly disciplined life. It is an invitation to holiness."¹²⁴ The balance lies in the churches' courage and grace to allow everyone to be heard while maintaining the pursuit of holiness.

Darian Lockett, in an article entitled "Strong and Weak Lines," exegetes the Letter of James and concludes that James' use of "pure" language (1:27) serves as signposts to show the difference between the faithful and unfaithful.¹²⁵ James is concerned with carefully controlled boundaries in order to conceive of an identity and

¹²² Pohl, 130.

¹²³ Bernard and Clapp, 110.

¹²⁴ Jacobsen, 55.

¹²⁵ Darian Lockett, "Strong and Weak Lines: Permeable Boundaries between Church and Culture in the Letter of James." *Review and Expositor*, 108, (Summer 2011), 392.

establish markers of difference with surrounding social groups. According to Lockett, James' language both establishes strong lines that mark out "pure religion;" what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in the church. How Christians treat the marginalized, the widow, the fatherless; what is said, what wisdom is received, and what direction one's affections are pointed, distinguish what is from God and what is "earthly." Lockett points to a consistent contrast in James between two competing worldviews; one is God's the other is of the "world."¹²⁶ But Lockett also points to the permeable nature of boundaries in James' readership:

James readers lived in the highly pluralistic context of the Diaspora and were both religiously and culturally in the minority and no doubt face external pressure to assimilate with surrounding cultures...Christian identity in James is constructed along the lines of its own internal vision of wholeness before God and not through a negative process of rejecting outsiders.¹²⁷

The boundaries of hospitality are sustained by a careful attention to its central and authoritative place in the life of the Christian. It is through welcoming but not affirming (Stanley Grenz) those who are not yet convinced of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and whose life decisions are pointed away from God's hospitable invitation to his Holy Presence. The identity of the faith is maintained by the Spirit's work leading people to confession, repentance, baptism, and dying to self. In regards to the spiritual barometer of the church, the question that many authors implied in their comments was: who is influencing who?

How can Christian hospitality be better practiced in the church?

The final question looks for some practical steps that local churches can make in order to be more hospitable to strangers in their midst. Henry Brinton suggests four best

¹²⁶ Lockett, 396.

¹²⁷ Lockett, 399, 402.

practices that serve as tree roots, that when they are healthy give way to the fruit of reconciliation, outreach, and new perceptions of God's inclusive love.¹²⁸ These roots are the following:

1. *A welcoming site:* (21-30)
 - a. Make sure each guest is greeted at least three times before they are seated.
 - b. Select warm greeters with quick smiles.
 - c. When giving directions, lead, don't point.
 - d. During the service, be attentive to guests' needs but don't intrude or single them out.
 - e. Use clear visual communication: website and overhead projection.
2. *A welcoming worship service:* (31-52)¹²⁹
 - a. Don't barrage guests with pleas for money.
 - b. Choose accessible hymns and songs.
 - c. Try to keep service length to an hour.
 - d. Have members, not guests, identify themselves by wearing name tags.
3. *A welcoming meal:* (53-63)
 - a. God's people need to be nourished around tables with fellowship and food.
 - b. Make group meals a regular, anticipated part of your church's life together.
 - c. Avoid 'club religion' at meal times by finding ways to help people who do not yet know each other sit together for food and conversation.
 - d. Think of meals as potential outreach methods of the larger community.
4. *A welcoming small group:* (64-78)
 - a. Cultivate small groups where individuals can make personal connections in intimate and honest gatherings.
 - b. Create small groups around a limited course offering and then evaluate from there.
 - c. Meet at least monthly, and preferably more often.
 - d. Devote times in each meeting for personal sharing and prayer for one another, as well as, discussion of some assigned topic or reading.

Bernard and Clapp mirrors Brinton's suggestions but breaks them down into specific age categories. They say a church needs to not only deep in their hospitality but wide as well, including everyone. How welcoming is the church to children, youth,

¹²⁸ Brinton, 15.

¹²⁹ "Worship is participating in God's own welcome. Brinton: The best hospitality comes from presenting worship as an opportunity for transformation, using it to connect people to a sense of community, filling it with good spiritual food, and making it a guest-centered and God-focused experience." Brinton, 46.

young adults, singles, and the marginalized? Furthermore, they ask some important questions on how welcoming are the physical facilities? Is it wheelchair accessible? Is the entryway as spacious and accommodating as possible? Are there parking spots available for guests? Are signs and information clearly visible for a newcomer? Is their ample seating? Is the church nursery taken seriously? Is the speaker system a match for the room? Are the grounds and buildings kept up?¹³⁰

Christine Pohl suggests eight beginning steps for any church to cultivate hospitality for the stranger.¹³¹ First, think about how a church member would learn any skill. You practice it until you get good at it. Be mentored by those who are good at hospitality. Second, practice it together. Find ways to support one another and build a support system around those who are practicing hospitality. Third, be attentive to “threshold” places. These are the spaces between public and private lives. For example, the workplace would be a good place to think creatively about hosting the Kingdom in that milieu. Forth, identify and have empathy for the stranger. Put oneself in their shoes and ask what it must be like to be a guest. As the church member has been a stranger, they understand what it feels like either to be welcomed, or not to be welcomed.

Pohl’s fifth step: provide people opportunities to try out hospitality in non-threatening and manageable settings. Set up situations where people can talk to strangers without fear and with grace. Sixth, teach the congregation the difference between hospitality and entertaining. Entertainment is about the performance of the host; hospitality is about caring for the guest without the confusing care with fussing and having everything done just right. Seventh, start with baby steps. Ask oneself “What are

¹³⁰ Bernard and Clapp, 113-132.

¹³¹ Pohl 2005.

the connections God's already given me that I can build on?" Finally, She also suggests taking a close look at scripture and church history to see how attentive the early church was to hospitality. She recommends making sure the church has an understanding of the priesthood of believers in that the church for the ministry of visiting people in hospitals and prisons.

To cultivate hospitality in the local church, Karl Barth adds four principles that guide a Christian encounter with others.¹³² The first principle is to look the stranger in the eye in such a way that they are visible to us. Seeing is inhuman if it is not the seeing of another person. Second, engage hearing. Hospitality requires allowing them to tell who they are. Third, render mutual aid. Only by actively standing by the other's side is our own humanity complete. Lastly, see, hear, and assist the stranger with gladness. Gladness is the heart of Christian hospitality.

Parker Palmer shares how a church approached engaging the public by taking 'religious' education into the public realm where nonmembers could be reached and public awareness aroused. He shared a story about how a church bridged the gap between white middle class neighbors with the rapidly increasing black and Latino neighbors by hosting "Living Room Seminars."¹³³ They got the mixed ethnic neighbors together to talk to one another. The goal was three pronged:

1. Assess their own resistance and openness to changes going on in the community.
2. Explore conditions under which people are empowered to deal with change appropriately.
3. Choose factor for change and act upon it.

¹³² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 3*, ed. trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), 250.

¹³³ Palmer, 155.

Michele Hershberger mentions an often-neglected piece of the hospitality discussion. That is, how do we engage the introvert in welcoming the stranger?¹³⁴ Hershberger remarks: “Introverts love the stranger also but hospitality looks different to people who are introverts. They also love the stranger but the actions of love they demonstrate may have more clearly defined boundaries and more intentional personal space...while they cannot use either personality traits as an excuse not to practice hospitality, the faith community, particularly extroverted members, must also be accepting of the different ways people live out their hospitality.

George Carey concludes this section with a call for the church to both proclaim the Gospel and to dialogue with the guests. Christians are called to both listen and to speak according to Carey. He cites one story that encompasses two portraits of Jesus that are held in tension. In John 12:20-28, some Greeks come to see Jesus, asking, “We have come to see Jesus.” and Jesus’ response is “Except a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” Jesus just didn’t show up and say, “Here I am, take a look.” He began a dialogue with them with the goal of proclaiming the Good News. Jesus wants to both proclaim and dialogue with all those who come to him and the church, as the Body of Christ, is called to do the same. When people enter into the church, according to Carey, they need both proclamation, “Jesus is Lord,” and dialogue, “Come let us reason together.”¹³⁵ Christian hospitality includes both proclaiming the truth of Christ’s Lordship and dialoguing with their guest’s on their worldviews. This is another way a local church can be more hospitable today.

¹³⁴ Hershberger, 59-60.

¹³⁵ Carey, 215-217.

Summary

These five questions addressed by the authors help frame the discussion of Christian hospitality as a framework for discipleship. The first question helped defined the unique nature of Christian hospitality. It is counter-cultural that seeks to love and welcome people regardless of benefit to the host or society's value placed upon them. The second question helped link the practice of hospitality with the relational aspect and goals of Christian discipleship. The third question helped identify the reasons and excuses Christians don't participate in the command to practice hospitality. The fourth question helped raise the challenging issues surrounding the tension that exists between local churches widening their welcome while pursing a Holy God. The final question helped provide some practical steps individuals and churches may take toward being more hospitable in this world. These questions were not exhaustive but served to facilitate future conversations with those in the church about discipleship and outreach.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN AND OUTCOMES

*The next time you sit at the table, look at others eating with you
as people extravagantly loved by God.*

- Joanne Thompson¹

Introduction

This project seeks to change people's perceptions about God, themselves, and strangers as it pertains to biblical hospitality. It does so by placing hospitality into a local church discipleship process. It is proposed that when Christians better understand both God's hospitality and their own respective roles as both guest and host in God's Kingdom, they will be changed. Moreover, their self-understanding will serve as a catalyst for Christian formation in the disciple. Specifically, this project seeks to form class participants' vision and way of thinking about their role in this world as a Christ follower by assisting them in their lives and ministries at New Life Assembly in Kittitas, Washington.

The goal is to better align participant's view of God and others with God's own hospitable nature and praxis found in the Bible. The participants who complete an eight-session class on the topic of biblical hospitality will more likely participate in hospitable acts that will facilitate their spiritual formation towards God's image found in Jesus Christ. The desired result will be participants engaging with others around them with a Great Commission view in mind and heart.

¹ Joanne Thompson, *Table Life: Savoring the Hospitality of Jesus in Your Home* (Edina, MN: Beaver's Pond Press, 2013) 93.

Methodology

There are four main approaches to my project. First, since the goal of this project is to increase participants' awareness to the issues of Christian hospitality and its role in Christian discipleship, then the Bible is our key resource. At New Life Assembly, one of our church values is the authority of Scripture in all areas of our lives. It is our sole rule of faith and conduct, therefore, the Bible will be our trailhead.

Secondly, the learning milieu will be a classroom setting encompassing both lecture and participant discussion. This will be a closed group with eight participants. For this project, the participants are five female and three male members ranging from early thirties to mid-sixties in age.

Thirdly, as seen in my literature review, I am also indebted to the many authors who offered keen exposition and insight that formulated much of my thinking. These writers will introduce participants to a wider conversation by providing important selections from their books and articles. Their work will provide the class several helpful discussion points and creative angles by which to reflect upon God's mission through hospitality.

And lastly, my qualitative measurement to determine class effectiveness will be a pre- and post self-survey that each participant will fill out just prior to beginning the first session and immediately following the last one. The participants are identified as P1, P2, et al. This survey provides a good comparison of data to see if there is a significant change in the participants' perspective in regards to Christian hospitality.

Project Design

The project took place in an inviting class format. The title of the discipleship class was *The Hidden Conversion: Hospitality and the Image of God*. The class consisted of eight one-hour sessions. Following Paul's structure in his letter to the Ephesians (first half of letter: theology; second half of letter: how to live that theology out), I designed the curriculum in like manner. The first four sessions were designed to provide a strong biblical basis and understanding of hospitality and next four emphasized applied theology. The sessions covered the following topics sessions:

Session 1: Introduction to Christian Hospitality.

Session 2: Hospitality in the Old Testament

Session 3: Hospitality in the Life of Jesus Christ

Session 4: Hospitality in the Early Church

Session 5: Barriers to Hospitality

Session 6: Boundaries of Hospitality

Session 7: Hospitality at New Life Assembly

Session 8: Hospitality and Me

A brief overview of the topics is as follows: Session 1 served as an introduction to the topic of hospitality and invited the class to wrestle with the definition and concept of hospitality as it relates to Christian discipleship. We asked the question, "When you think of hospitality what comes to mind?" and then discussed what Christian hospitality is and is not.

Because of the sheer breadth and depth of hospitality in the bible sessions 2 through 4 had to be limited to core samples in order to provide time for class discussion.

Session 2 discussed hospitality in the Old Testament from the four major components of the Old Testament: hospitality in the *Pentateuch* (Creation – Gen. 1; Abraham and Sarah hosting three Strangers – Gen. 18:1-15; the ‘alien/sojourner motif – Gen. 15:13; and Israel’s self-identification as strangers – Ex. 22:21-23), hospitality in the *Historical Books* (Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath – 1 Kgs. 17), hospitality in the *Wisdom Literature* (Job’s defense of innocence – Job 31:31-32) and hospitality in the *Prophets* (Isa. 25:6-8).

Session 3 discussed Jesus Christ’s own identification as *Divine Host* (Cana wedding and Road to Emmaus [John 4/Luke 24] and the Last Supper [Mt. 26:17-30]), Jesus as *Divine Guest* (guest of tax collectors and Pharisees – [Mt. 9:9-13/Lk. 14:1-14]), and Jesus as *Divine Stranger* (John 1:1-10/Mt. 15:31-46).

Session 4 surveyed hospitality in the life of the early church. It touched upon hospitality in the *Book of Acts* as a launching pad for the gospel (Acts 10:24-48); the commands and concerns of hospitality found in the *New Testament Epistles* (1 Tim. 3:2/2 John 10-11); and hospitality in the writings of the *Early Church Fathers* (Dionysius, *Epistle 12* to the Alexandrians).

The second half, focusing on life application of the content, began with a class on the barriers to hospitality. This session offered eight reasons why Christians fail to practice hospitality. They were framed as reasons generally stemming from a lack of something: lack of heart, time, sight, space, faith, understanding, obedience, and the proper spirit. Group discussion followed.

Session 6 addressed the challenging topic of the boundaries of hospitality. A brief introduction to the influence of Jacque Derrida was followed by examples from the Old

and New Testament where God provided boundaries to hospitality. This session asked the question, “How do we sustain the right boundaries while also welcoming strangers?”

Session 7 challenged the class to reflect upon the class content and apply it to the life and mission of New Life Assembly. This session asked the question, “How would a person who had no religious background perceive our church if they walked in the doors on a Sunday morning?” This was asked to consider hospitality in areas such as church language and culture, avoiding religious assumptions and providing a welcoming place for all that communicated both God’s grace and God’s truth. This was then followed up with a discussion on the possible contrasting forms of hospitality provided for both people of faith and people without any religious background.

The final session was designed to call the participants to a life of hospitable practice. Most of the class time was open to personal reflection and discussion how each participant in the class might apply Christian hospitality in their lives at home, work place and at play and rest.

A Pre- and Post-survey was taken by the participants in order to assess the effectiveness of the class content and learning. The survey was structured into four sections (see appendix A). These sections were selected for their potential in collecting and analyzing qualitative data. The first section was *Word Identification*. The second section consisted of fifteen multiple choice questions designed to provide a scale whereby participants might reflect a graduating sense of their own self-awareness towards God and others. An example from the survey: *I can tell others what makes Christian hospitality ‘Christian.’*

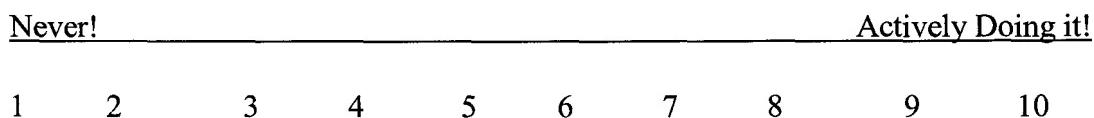
- *Totally true of me*

- *Mostly true of me*
- *Moderately true of me*
- *Somewhat true of me*
- *Not at all true of me*

The Third section was a short answer exercise asking the participants to complete the following sentence, *Hospitality is central to the Christian faith because...* The purpose of this exercise was to measure the participants' understanding of the class content to determine if either they're catching the central points or if my teaching or curriculum needs adjusting.

The final section was a simple sliding scale measuring the participants' present readiness to act in hospitably ways:

As of today, circle the number that reflects how likely are you to invest your life in hosting and helping guests and strangers:



Outcomes

The following are the results of the class participants' pre- and post-class surveys. For individual and specific data on all sections please refer to the following appendixes: *Word Identification* – Appendix B; *Multiple Choice* – Appendix C; *Short Answer* – Appendix D; and, *Degree of Readiness* – Appendix E.

Word Identification

The first section of the self-survey provided three key words to the class topic: *hospitality*, *stranger*, and *Christian*. The participants were then asked to circle five corresponding words that most came to mind with the given key word. If a word was not

present they could provide another word in a blank space that better corresponded with the key word. The rationale behind this exercise was to gain a sense of the individual's thinking and perception behind terms in order to better understand their view of the practice of hospitality, strangers, and themselves as followers of Jesus Christ.

As with all self-surveys they are highly subjective exercises encompassing many variables and therefore can be challenging in assessing in any concrete fashion. However, they can provide a general view of either static or notable shifts in individual and/or group thinking. Either of which provides information for assessment. The following results indicate the words circled by the participants. The number in parenthesis indicates the number of times the word was circled by the class. A note here: the numbers do not always add up to expected forty responses as one might expect, despite written and verbal instruction, some members circled less than five words per section.

Figure 1 – Name Recognition: Hospitality

Pre-Hospitality	Post-Hospitality
friends (6x), food (5x), fun (3x), home (3x), love (3x), house cleaning (2x), entertainment (2x), anxious (2x), God (2x); stranger (2x), coffee/tea, customer service, impression, responsibility, hassle, neighbors, church, commitment, God, salvation, pamper.	love (7x), God (5x), responsibility (4x), stranger (4x), mission (3x), perception (3x), discipleship (2x), home (2x), food (2x), anxious, church, friends, salvation, coffee/tea, impression, commitment, transformation.

The first observation is the shift in perspective of the most frequently chosen word groups. For example, before the class the words most identified (three times or more by the eight participants) for *hospitality* were, *friends, food, fun home, and love*. After the class the words most identified were *love, God, responsibility, stranger,*

mission, and perception. The impression of hospitality before the class reflected a good time having fun and playing games with people you know best. The impression after class appeared to shift towards a more intentional and responsibility view of hospitality that included God and his mission with others previously unknown. This is encouraging as it reflected a possible shift in hospitality as merely a benefit for oneself to a more intentional, missional understanding.

The second observation is related to the first. And perhaps this is a concern. While the participants seemed to have changed their view of hospitality, the hope is that their view was not changed from something unintentionally viewed as wrong. For example, hospitality as a practice may indeed include having fun and with friends over a meal. Hospitality can be both enjoyable and missional. The intended learning point is that is often times sacrificial and boring. But what is apparent is that their shift in emphasis has moved closer to a biblical understanding of hospitality.

Also, any move towards a more missional approach to hospitality would be incomplete and miss a central aspect of biblical hospitality if *food* was not considered as important to hospitality. *Food* was identified five times before class and only twice afterwards. I suspect that this is directly related to limitations within the class itself. Given the constraints both within the limitations of this thesis and the class project itself, food was given less of a role in the discussion than it actually required otherwise. The class response seemed to closely reflect the class content.

Figure 2 – Name Recognition: Stranger

Pre- Stranger	Post- Stranger
caution (6x), outsider (5x), unknown (4x), guest (2x), foreigner (2x), opportunity (2x), invite (2x), curious (2x), different (2x), me, friendly, threat, them, poor, anxious, avoid, security.	invite (5x), opportunity (4x), guest (3x), outsider (3x), mission (3x) responsibility (3x), different (2x), God (2x), friend, caution, curious, unknown, friendly, poor, foreigner, accepting, forgiving, loving, sacrificial.

Using the same format as above, one observes with the term *stranger* that the most circled words shifted in emphasis before and after the class. Before the class the most circled words (three times or more) were *caution*, *outsider*, and *unknown*. After the class they were *invite*, *opportunity*, *guest*, *outsider*, *mission*, and *responsibility*. The shift appears to be from a view of the *stranger* as someone to walk carefully around to an emphasis not on the *stranger* but upon the host as a person of responsibility and opportunity. The shift appears to move from the host questioning the guest to the host guesting his own internal life and motives. This seems to indicate significant participant self-reflection.

It should be also noted that there were several significant words that remain circled in the post-survey. Words such as *outsider*, *different*, *caution*, and *curious* remained. These are not necessarily wrong words to circle as we discussed in class the place of prudence in a world of violence. What might be helpful information instead are the absence of the words *anxious*, *threat*, and *avoid* in the post-class survey which could better indicate a more balanced approach to biblical hospitality as a life practice.

Figure 3 – Name Recognition: Christian

Pre- Christian	Post- Christian
loving (7x), accepting (3x), forgiving (3x), disciple (3x), genuine (2x), different (2x), courageous (2x), friendly (2x), obedient (2x), host, hypocrite, same, protective, cautious, judge, sacrificial, righteous, attentive, genuine, forgiving.	loving (7x), forgiving (5x), host (5x), accepting (4x), attentive (4x), friendly (3x), sacrificial (3x), disciple (2x), courageous, genuine, conformer, sacrificial, obedient, guest, different.

In contrast to the two previous key words, Christian appears more consistent before and after class. Perhaps this should be expected as many Christians understand the biblical standard for Christian living. The same top-three words circled before the class, *loving*, *accepting*, and *forgiving*, were circled after the class. With only slight variations several of the same top-three terms appeared in both: *disciple*, *friendly*, and *sacrificial*, for example, remain constant. What stands out is the jump from one identification of *host* before class to five afterwards. At least initially, over half of the participations identified their role in hospitality with their identification as a Christian. This could easily be attributed to an early response to the class content but it is hoped that it would have traction beyond the class bell.

The *Word Identification* exercise was designed to determine how the biblical material and class experience would alter how people would eventually view God, themselves, others, and the practice of hospitality itself. It appears that the class experience, at least initially, challenged some previous held assumptions. First, *hospitality* appeared to move from a position of self-enjoyment with people who are previously loved and appreciated to a position of intentionality and responsibility with God and his mission at hand.

Secondly, *stranger* appeared to move from viewing another as outside the camp with little thought of the invitation to a position of owning the responsibility as host; inviting the *stranger* in from the outside. Thirdly, *Christian* is consistent in the virtues of *love, forgiveness* and *acceptance*. These are Bible words and despite the pull of idealizing these virtues and disconnecting them from hospitable practices, they should remain markers of the faith because they are markers of Jesus Christ. But the noticeable emergence of the Christians' identity with *host* suggests most reflected on their faith in new and hospitable ways. Overall, the exercise appears to have reflected a shift in perspective towards a more intentional move towards hospitality that encompasses both outreach and discipleship.

Multiple Choice

The fifteen multiple choice (MC) statements provided were designed to garner participants' perceptions of strangers and class understanding of theological themes surrounding hospitality. The results were measured by attributing a numerical value of 1 through 5 to their answers. For example, *Not at all true of me* = 1; *Totally true of me* = 5.

The MC statements were as follows:

1. I try my best to live by the Bible's teaching.
2. I desire to live like Jesus in all areas of my life.
3. My home is where I get away from the world.
4. During Sunday worship gatherings I seek out new people to get together with outside of church scheduled events.
5. I believe hospitality is a salvation issue.
6. I prefer to spend time with people like me.

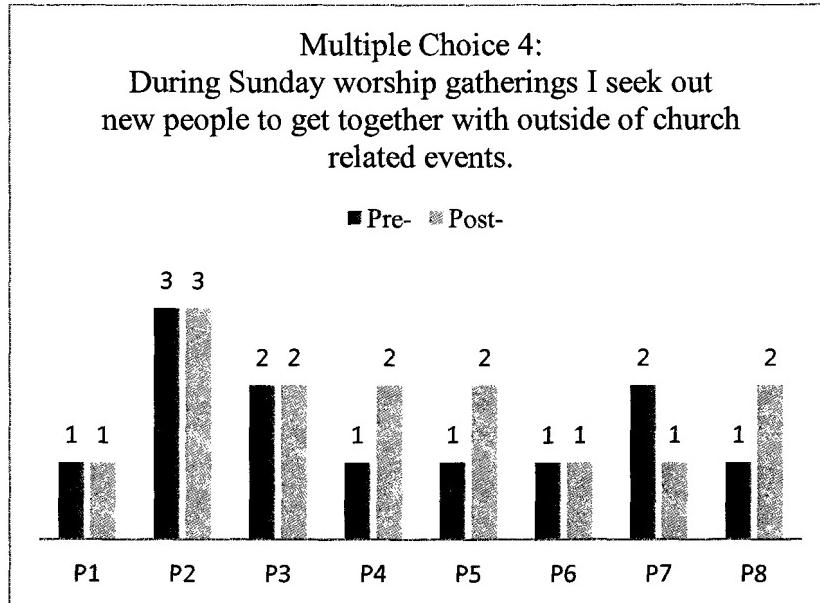
7. During Sunday church gatherings I don't really pay attention to people I don't already know.
8. I believe that entertainment is central to effective hospitality.
9. I prefer church to be a "family" place where everyone knows one another.
10. As a follower of Jesus Christ I believe I am responsible for hosting others.
11. I can identify what makes Christian hospitality unique. In other words, I can tell others what makes Christian hospitality 'Christian.'
12. I believe that if a church is a loving community it will not experience conflict.
13. I identify and empathize with strangers.
14. I feel like I've hosted well if people complement me & seemed impressed.
15. My home needs to be in order for me to invite guests over.

Although there were fifteen statements, five were intentionally targeted to help determine the effectiveness of the class. After reviewing the class results and talking with participants it became clear that some questions were either poorly constructed or repetitive. MC 7 is an example of both. It included a double negative and basically was after the same information as MC 4. Two of the participants asked for clarification on MC 7 while taking the survey that suggests that others may have been confused as well. The fact that it resulted in a .08% increase may indicate that the class content was ineffective in raising awareness of others, which other data contradicts, or perhaps it indicates a general lack of engagement with an awkwardly stated question.

Other statements such as MC 1 and MC 2 were predictably answered and provided little help other than affirming the students were strong in their Christian faith. This had personally already been known by being their pastor and these questions would

be better suited for a wider audience encompassing those with less exposure to Christian faith. The five central statements are MC 4, MC 5, MC 10, MC 11, and MC 13.

Figure 4 – Multiple Choice 4

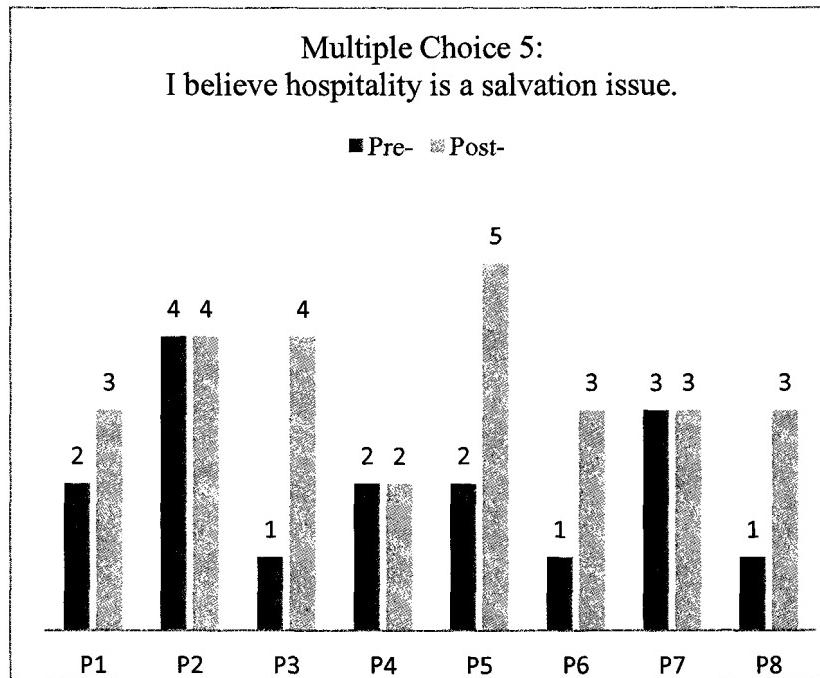


MC 4 confirmed some of my concerns as to why I chose this thesis. New Life is a friendly place but that does not always translate into being a place where people can make friends. As a church we need to grow in this area of discipleship. The participants did not view themselves either before or after the class as seeking connections with others they do not meet at church related events. The low scores both before and after and the disappointing .14% increase in the data are indicative of this fact. Only three of the eight students' pre-survey results actually increased. And all three went from the lowest level of involvement, *not at all true* to one degree above, *somewhat true*. Is this a case of behavior lagging behind learning or is it a lack of something more deeply ingrained. Whichever, the results were disappointing.

This brings up a future need in the development of this curriculum. What is needed is a series of follow up classes to allow participants to see the results of their

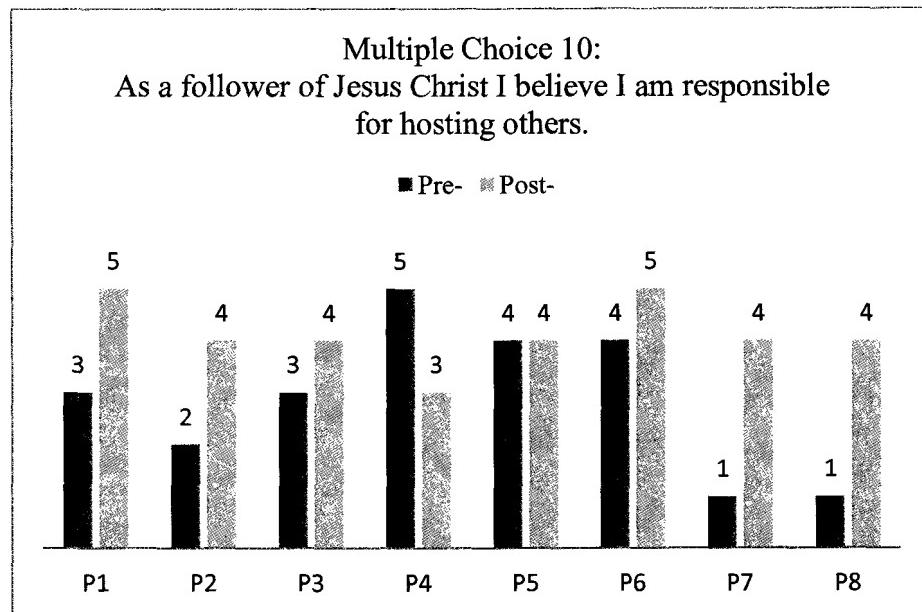
scores and provide an opportunity for discussion on how hospitality has been incorporated into the fabric of their lives. Gatherings would be at the one-month, three-month and six-month intervals. This would provide opportunity for the class discussion to be integrated within the context of accountability and community.

Figure 5 – Multiple Choice 5



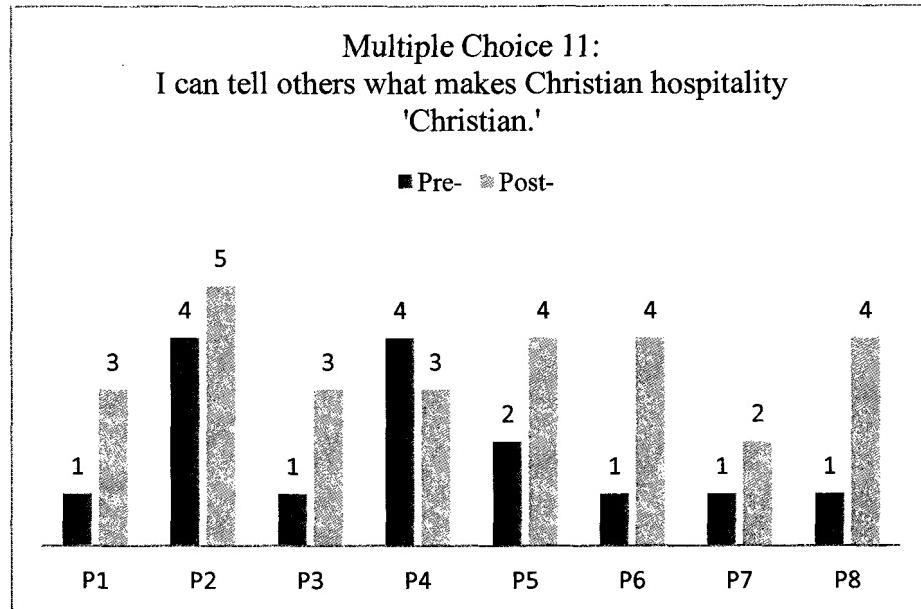
MC 5 was design to measure the class understanding of the link between hospitality and the mission of God. This result is more promising as there was a 40% increase in understanding the importance of hospitality in the role of the Great Commission. P3, P5, and P8's responses show a significant move towards viewing hospitality both within the Great Commission and within their lives.

Figure 6 – Multiple Choice 10



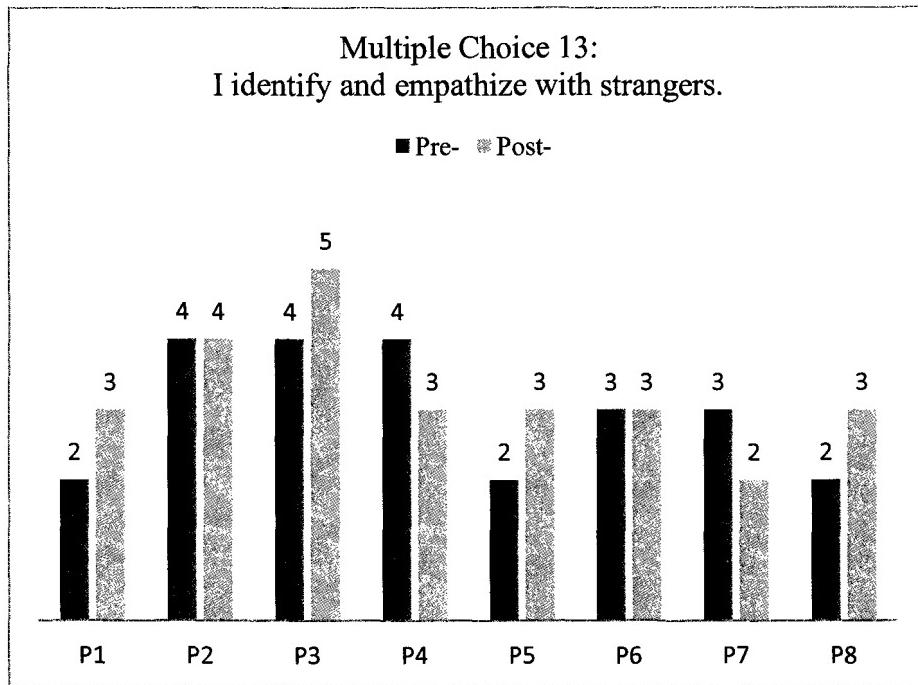
MC 10 was designed measure the link between the participant's responsibility to Christ with their responsibility to the stranger. The class emphasized the mercurial nature of God's hospitality as being ever present in the life of a Christian. Hospitality is not located in any one sphere; Kingdom hospitality may take place anywhere. Here again we see positive movement. Most participants either maintained their level of personal responsibility towards others or they moved up; P1, P2, P7, and P8 showed a substantial increase while P4 actually showed a substantial decrease. It is uncertain as to why P4 dropped but this could be ferreted out in a follow-up session. It could be that they rated higher because they viewed themselves before class as more adept at the topic and through self-discovery and the class content they determined otherwise. As a group, they increased their sense of responsibility for hospitality by 23%.

Figure 7 – Multiple Choice 11



MC 11 was designed to measure the participants' ability to recall the class material; specifically when it comes to the unique nature of Christian hospitality. The results are understandably positive as most participants had little exposure to the topic before hand. P1, P3, P5, P6, P8 all reflected a notable increase in their understanding and confidence with the topic and P4 again showed a decrease. The group increased by 46%.

Figure 8 – Multiple Choice 13



MC 13 was designed so that the participants could reflect on what a stranger may be experiencing in any given milieu such as entering a church for the first time. The results are disappointing especially in light of the class emphasis on Jesus teaching in Matthew 25. As a group they increased by 17% but no one showed a substantial increase and P4 and P7 actually decreased. Again, it is unclear as to why there was not substantial movement in this more important statement. But it could be once again that the class uncovered what empathy should look like in their world, thus, they saw themselves as a result doing it less. The silver lining here is that six of the participants rated themselves at least moderately able to emphasize with strangers.

One of the tasks of analyzing data is to look for certain themes to emerge. I see one important theme emerging from the five examples above. On one hand the class showed substantial growth in areas that had to do with content. That is in MC 5, MC 10, and MC 11 they scored a combined increase of 36.5%. These statements reflect a

person's belief and knowledge about someone or something. The class had a dramatic increase in their understanding on a particular subject. In contrast, MC 4 and MC 13 scored a combined 19% increase. These two statements, had to do with seeking out strangers to greet and having direct empathy for them. According to their own reporting, it appears that the class grew more in their understanding of the content than they did in identification with strangers. In other words, it appears that they related better to the program than the person. It is probably unfair to expect participants to have equal growth in an eight-session class. This may be in keeping with my previous statement that if you change the perspective the potential for change in behavior will follow. However, at the close of the class behavior change remained stationary according to the data. This just underscores the importance of follow up sessions and their role in taking the content and putting it into real time and space.

Short Answer

The third section of the survey was designed to measure how well the participants understood and processed the theme of hospitality within the larger scope of Christian discipleship. The goal was for the participants to place hospitality in relationship to Jesus Christ, discipleship and/or the Great Commission. They were to complete the following question: *Hospitality is central to the Christian faith because...* Below are their answers before and after the class.

Figure 9 - Short Answer: Hospitality is central to the Christian faith because...

	Pre-	Post-
1	<i>Christianity is all about relationship.</i>	<i>Being a follower of Christ is all about relationships.</i>
2	<i>God is the ultimate host. How we host Him and how we host others reflects our hearts.</i>	<i>It is our response to the Ultimate Host. How we host Him and others is critical.</i>

3	<i>Hospitality is being a friend. Friendly. Open and giving of self.</i>	<i>Hospitality means friendship. Jesus (among other things) is a friend to us and if I'm trying to live like him I must be a friend to others.</i>
4	<i>It shows your love for others and is an example to others of love.</i>	<i>It is the model that Christ gave us. God first loved us with his hospitality. As Christians we need to show the same to others.</i>
5	<i>Shows love towards each other. I entertain not very often. Always am happy afterwards. Entertaining is hospitable.</i>	<i>Shows a concern and feeling for others, opens the door for people to become Christians.</i>
6	<i>By example of the Lord.</i>	<i>It is required of me as a Christian but God is really the Host and I am the instrument which allows him this place to show Himself through my being hospitable.</i>
7	<i>I believe you need to invite people, and help people, if you love God in your life.</i>	<i>God command.</i>
8	<i>You invite someone in, you provide for them, whether it's food or drink or conversation. You provide a welcoming safe place, just as Christ did for me.</i>	<i>Christ accepted me as I was and am, so He is the example to follow.</i>

The key themes prior to class appear to be *relationships, friends, example, love, invitation and God*. All are important themes and reflect, in my opinion, an anticipation of the class material. The participants heard about the class and wanted to be there because they were already interested in the topic. It would be interesting to ask Christians without prior notice this question to compare answers.

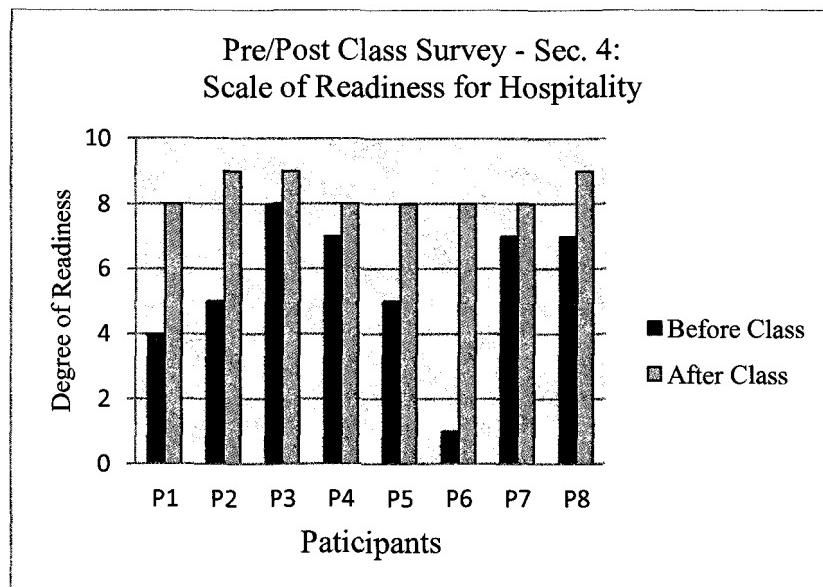
Many of the themes reappear after the class with a few noticeable differences. First, *Christ* or *Christianity* was mentioned twice before class and seven times afterwards. It seems that *hospitality* had become more central to *Jesus Christ* specifically. More importantly, however, is the emerging theme in the second column. P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, and P8 either directly or indirectly state that hospitality is a response to what God has

already done for us in Jesus Christ. Although no one directly connected hospitality as central to discipleship, they did so as an responsive act of following Christ, his life and commands.

Scale of Readiness

The final section was designed as a simple scale to measure participants overall state of readiness to practice biblical hospitality before the class and then afterwards.

Figure 10 – Scale of Readiness for Hospitality



The results were encouraging. All of the participants felt more ready to actually practice forms of hospitality with others they do not know after the class than before. The average individual participant's score before class was 5.5. The average after the class was 8.4. The lukewarm consensus prior to class had warmed up quite a bit. The pre-survey total was 44; post-survey total was 67 for a percentage of readiness increase of 52%.

These results should be tempered by the prior observations of individual's reluctance to connect with strangers at church and emphasize with strangers. One may ask how do you reconcile these two contrasting data. My sense is that the group after the class was excited about what they had learned and was ready to go further but they still had some apprehension about what that looks like in real time. This is where the follow-up sessions stressing a more hands on accountability and support system would book end with this class nicely.

Class Evaluations

At the conclusion of the eight-sessions together, participants were asked to fill out an anonymous class feedback form (see Appendix F). They were asked about the strengths of the class (what areas were most helpful and enjoyable) and about areas of growth for the class (what parts could be strengthened or included that were not included). According to the participants, learning how hospitality played such a prevalent and important role in the biblical narrative was very important and challenging to their thinking. For example, the story of Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17) was eye opening to some members. It was also enlightening for them to consider God's image as hospitable in nature and that Jesus Christ reflected this in his life and ministry on earth. Seven out of eight participants felt challenged by the material and all appreciated the experience. They also expressed a strong appreciation for the time set aside for open discussion on given topics.

As for areas of growth, clearly, there needed to be more time for the participants to process and discuss the material. The wanted longer classes and longer periods of discussion to process the content and share stories and insights with one another. This is

important feedback for future classes as more time to process may lead to better results.

One concern with this feedback however is the tendency for Christians to love the learning but not the doing. An example of this was discovered in one person's proposal for class homework by which they concluded, *I would like homework ☺. Actually I know hospitality is my homework but I still feel like I need to chew on the Word more.* This just solidifies the need for follow-up sessions. A great suggestion by one member was to spend the last session developing personal action plans to integrate the learning.

Summary

The class survey and feedback forms helped inform my thinking for future ministry. In the first section of the survey there was a clear movement in how the group identified key terms after the class compared to before the class. They moved from a entertaining, friendship concept to a intentional, missional, and God-center one. The second section suggested there was significant growth in the participants understanding of class content and how their belief system had been contoured by the biblical material. This was contrasted, however, with the results of lower growth in areas that called the participants to empathize and engage the stranger. This may simply indicate a true and continual anxiety about inviting strangers into one's life or it may or it may have more to do with a need to process the content and have a plan in place in order to practice hospitality in a supportive and committed group setting. The third section completed a sentence designed measure the members understanding of hospitality as central to Christian discipleship. Although there were minimal overall changes in their statements there was noticeable movement to hospitality as a response to what God has already one in Jesus Christ, placing the practice in a more Christ-center position. The final section of

the survey revealed a dramatic shift in the group in their readiness to practice biblical hospitality. They appeared excited and ready to test the waters of God's hospitality in this world. The class feedback told me three important things: one, they loved the material; two, they wanted more time; and three, they needed some actions steps to go forward.

The goal of this project was to introduce biblical hospitality as a framework for discipleship within a local church setting in order to change people's perceptions about God, themselves, and strangers. By doing so, disciples will better understand and embrace their role within the Great Commission and become more like Christ in life and practice, the goal of every Christian. But more importantly, they will have a deeper love and appreciation for Jesus as both Lord and Savior and glorify His name through hospitable acts. I believe this class revealed the potential to be God's tool to that end. Like a potter's rib in the hand of the potter, this class has the potential to help contour the disciple into God's image. But the proof will be in the pudding. So, I close this chapter with an unsolicited follow-up letter I received from one of the class members a few weeks after the class was over. The class impact on this couple is promising:

Kevin,

I just wanted to write a quick note about the hospitality class. The seeds have been planted. The other night, (husband) and I were at a function where the tables were full. To my surprise (husband) invited a gay couple to join us at our table. We had time to visit and discover more about them. Now I have two women with fractured hearts that I can pray for. Then a couple days later one of the guys (husband) works with mentioned he will be staying in Ellensburg for the summer while his soon to be wife will be moving to Vashon Island. Without hesitation my mind went to 'he can stay here.' That is a major shift in my heart and mind, I haven't wanted any 'stranger' living with me.

We don't know yet if he will stay with us but our hearts are different. I wrote this without my glasses so good luck reading it.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND FUTURE STUDIES

When a man understands the art of seeing, he can trace the spirit of an age and the features of a king even in the knocker on a door.

- Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*¹

In *Book III* of *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, Victor Hugo allocates two chapters describing the architecture of Paris. The first chapter provides vivid detail of the Cathedral itself, the second, the city as a whole. Upon first glance, these chapters offer a surprising and interesting sidebar to the story. But Hugo's intention is not simply for providing backdrop; it is central to the story. It is a love song to the city itself.

Hugo intends to establish the role of architecture as a voice for communicating the Parisian spirit of the 15th century. For Hugo, architecture is an embodied link between the city and her culture. But in *Book III*, he laments the loss of medieval Gothic architecture's role in communicating to the residents the history, values, and traditions of the people who live there. The influences of the printing press and increasing literacy have shifted eyes off of the buildings and onto text. For Hugo, *seeing* is an art and he wants to help others understand what they are looking at in order to understand the important messages behind the details of a gable, a buttress, or even a doorknocker.

The New Testament Apostles also believed that buildings embody important messages. Peter told the early church that they were 'living stones' being crafted by God for a spiritual home for God and Jesus Christ himself is the chief cornerstone of the

¹ Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (New York: The New American Library, 1965), 134.

building (1 Peter 1: 4-6). Paul wrote that the church was God's Temple, a place of God's dwelling (1 Cor. 3: 16, 17). These early writers saw the church's architecture through God's revelation and the details of the building communicated the history, values, and traditions of the people. When it comes to hospitality, the front door of the God's building should clearly say, 'welcome.' It has been the goal of this project to help the church in the art of seeing and assist her in better understanding the message behind God's design of his church.

As a local church, New Life Assembly seeks to communicate, not just by what we say, but what we do. Our design speaks to the value we place upon discipleship. Our mission statement reads, "New Life Assembly exists to make and send disciples of Jesus Christ." It is a simple, albeit industrial statement. We wanted it clear and to the point. But like yesterday's Parisians we tend to focus on the text of Scripture while ignoring the present realities that surround us. We may understand the Scripture but do not always understand what we are supposed to represent or how we are to embody the message of welcome to others.

The practice of hospitality is an essential component of Christian faith and spirituality yet it remains in many churches undervalued, misunderstood, or ignored. Moreover, as reflected in the Bible, hospitality has been, and continues to be, a means by which God discipiles and reaches out to the world for the sake of His Kingdom. This project has sought to bring hospitality closer to the center stage of discipleship and outreach by introducing members in a local church to the biblical and theological conversations surrounding the topic. The end game is to change the members' perspectives towards God and the stranger so that they might experience two results: they

would more effectively reflect God's image and they would practice outreach in this world. My concern with church in general is that there lies a subtle disconnect between the message of the text and the message of the church. People are struggling to see God's hospitality on the doorknocker of the people of God, the Cathedral of the God's presence.

The title of this project is, *The Hidden Conversion: Christian Hospitality as a Framework for Discipleship*. It is my belief that understanding and practicing biblical forms of hospitality is critical to becoming more like Jesus Christ and extending his Kingdom in this world, the goal of the Christian life. Hospitality, then, is a framework for discipleship because hospitality provides the milieu by which discipleship takes place. When a disciple follows Jesus in word and deed they will eventually become more like Jesus and subsequently evangelize their world.² At New Life, the 'making' and 'sending' of disciples in the past has included various study groups on important topics like basic Christian doctrine, the spiritual disciplines, and family issues. These groups have been well lead by members and have produced some encouraging results. But there lacks a discipleship component that captures the focus and responsibility of the Christian in engaging the stranger in our midst. This project has been a baby step in that direction.

Personally, I have harvested much from the labor. It has been a process that has been invigorating, reflective, frustrating, demanding, and humbling all at once. I have learned much; yet, I have come to the conclusion that I know very little about the vast canon of literature and conversations taking place on this topic. But it has been a growing experience and hopefully one that will produce more fruit for years to come. The following are ten lessons I've learned from this project. They are not in any specific order other than in the way they came to me upon reflection.

² Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 233.

Lessons Learned from the Project:

1. Less is more.

It became clear very early on in my project that I had bitten off more than I could chew. The initial idea behind my project was to introduce church members to biblical hospitality in order to change their perspective towards God and the stranger and thereby change their behavior to a more intentional welcome. But the sheer height and breadth of the topic expanded beyond the limitations of my writing and allocated class time. Upon reflection, it would have been better to limit the topic to a more specific area rather than the sweeping panoramic vision I tried to produce. Class participants enjoyed their experience but lamented that it was akin to drinking water from a fire hose.

A better approach would be to focus on one element of biblical hospitality rather than the whole bible. For instance, using only one section of the Bible to focus on, such as, hospitality in the life of Abraham or Sarah or the hospitality commands in the New Testament Epistles would have worked nicely to help focus the attention and discussion of the class. There would have been less material to cover and more time to discuss the material; a repeated suggestion from the class feedback forms.

2. More is more.

With less material and sharper focus on the subject matter the project would have greater potential for more class interaction and self-discovery. Based on class experience and participants' feedback forms, participants needed more time to wrestle with the implications of the class material and apply it to their lives. In addition, they asked for more hands on training as a follow-up to the material. This was welcomed and helpful feedback as it addresses the goal of the project: perspective change leading to behavior

change. As stated in chapter four, a personal development plan was needed which included individual hospitality plans that initiate and implement plans and actions steps. Furthermore, three follow-up check-in sessions at one-month, three-month, and six-month intervals should be in place to assure movement towards praxis.

As part of the development plan, bridging hospitality to the hospitality ministry within the church would work nicely as a safe and natural ‘testing’ ground for people to become involved in meeting strangers and serving others. Although the goal is for participants to practice hospitality in their homes, schools, and workplace, the church setting might suffice as a good beginning point. Where less is more in regards to class material, more is more in regards to applied theology.

3. Re-think (and re-think again) the project survey.

When I first designed my survey I wanted it to gather as much pertinent information as possible. Initially, my class pre- and post-survey encompassed the same four part components of *Word Identification*, *Multiple Choice*, *Short Answer*, and *State of Readiness Scale* as the one I used for this project. I had it tested beforehand by a couple of people (not involved in the project) who were familiar with qualitative analysis. Their feedback proved helpful as initially I had twenty-five multiple-choice questions and it was reduced to a more manageable fifteen. But I should have spent more time on those fifteen questions as to both the questions’ content and form. As mentioned, a couple questions were poorly written and required explanation. Still other questions provided predictable and unhelpful data. For example, the first two questions asked if they were Christian and if they believed the Bible to be God’s Word. These questions would be

appropriate in a boarder context but not in my limited class of committed church members.

Also, I initially intended to have a second control group who took the pre- and post-class self surveys but did not go through the class. Their data would be compared to assess the class effectiveness. This was a suggestion offered by my analysis consultant, Dr. Brian Auday. He said it would be interesting to compare the two groups' results but added it might not provide beneficial data. The latter proved to be the case. I did asked eight members who did not attend the class to fill out the same surveys at the same time as the class participants. After compiling the two groups' data it became clear that the data from the non-participating group would not have helped me measure the class effectiveness. The data from the non-participating group was random and too speculative for this project. It could be that the random nature of the data was important comparable data, but I opted out because I felt in the end it would have detracted from the class participants' data. Lesson learned: work smarter on the front end of the survey development in order to aim for accurate and helpful information, not just interesting information.

4. The church needs the stranger.

It's not a stretch to understand how, from a Christian point of view, a stranger would need the church – and by stranger I do not simply mean someone not previously known; but rather, a person who is not yet convinced of the Lordship of Jesus Christ or one living on the margins of society. It is foundational to the Great Commission and the orthodox Christian theology that the lost need to be found. But when it comes to the mission of God and our own spiritual formation, the found also need the lost. John

Koenig mentioned in chapter three that if Christians claim to love God, they should therefore love humanity since God meets us in the stranger (Matt. 25:31-46).³ If we are to know God, part of the discipleship process is to engage with others who cross our areas of influence in hospitable and relationally building ways. In other words, the church doesn't do discipleship holistically until strangers are intentionally welcomed into the created spaces everywhere: in the Sunday gatherings, individual homes, the marketplace and in places of leisure. The stranger, wherever we find them, tells us about ourselves and is essential in our lives in developing Christ-likeness.

5. The church needs to be trained to see.

This wasn't so much as a surprise as it was my confirmation of New Life Assembly's tendency to be myopic. In general, New Life tends to see only as far as our 'social enclaves' (Parker Palmer). This was evident in the data collected and in the observation of those participants even after the class. A valuable addition to this class on hospitality would be an interconnected workshop with a focus on relational skill development in regards to meeting strangers. Issues of identifying the strangers in one's midst, learning people's names, beginning conversations, making eye contact, reading personal comfort levels, avoiding church language codes, and conversations surrounding the Christian imagination would all contribute to a more rounded discipleship milieu. Jean Luc Marion was corrected when he said that the disciples of the Road to Emmaus lacked the imagination needed in order to see Jesus Christ in their midst. But imagination can be cultivated and relationships can be expanded.

³ John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 3.

6. In the end, practice is what counts.

As stated above, my goal in this project was to change participants' perspective towards the stranger. The data suggests that the class was effective in how they understood God, hospitality, their role as a Christian and people around them. But perspective is not enough. The project requires a carefully thought out hospitality plan complete with action steps and target skill sets. The plans would be participant-crafted so as to best conform to their respective life circumstances; changed perspective is great, but it is not enough.

7. Hospitality begins with me.

One of the surprising discoveries during this journey happened during a writing sabbatical. The church graciously allowed me two months away from the office to focus on this project. I had just completed writing about the tension that lies within the boundaries of church hospitality in regards to the issue of homosexuality when I decided to attend New Life for a Sunday morning worship service. Ironically, directly in front of me that Sunday was a lesbian couple holding hands. Pleased they were attending the service, I must also confess my unease with that scenario. The irony was not lost on me. Hospitality is easier to teach than it is to live. It must not only be learned out in a classroom but also lived out in real time. It begins with me and needs to be taught both in word and deed by myself to other reliable leaders so that they may teach others as well (2 Tim. 2:2).

As a leadership issue, those that lead and are the main influencers within the congregation need to both attend the class and embrace the values of hospitality through faithful life application. The importance of linking our 'discipleship' mission statement

with hospitality is central to the vision casting for the church as well as church leadership development. Having the leadership attend the class will be one of the first steps taken following this project. Leadership should show the passion and commitment to church values above and beyond what is expected of the congregation as a whole.

8. Hospitality is for the most part a ‘novel’ idea within my faith tradition.

Based on my conversations with both local Assembly of God (AG) leadership and church members at large, the concept of biblical hospitality was a new paradigm to many of them. Of course, this is not the case in all AG settings. For example, many in the academy and other AG churches are highly involved in the discussion and practice of hospitality. For example, Seattle’s *Community Dinners* is a church that transitioned from a traditional setting and understanding of how one does church, to a specific hospitality-centered approach to outreach and discipleship. But these I found to be the exceptions not the rule. In general, the role of biblical hospitality as a discipleship modality was totally foreign to most people I met within the AG. The potential for re-centering hospitality within my faith tradition is great.

I was encouraged by the hospitable actions of the national leadership of the AG and the Church of God in Christ in 2013. Both Pentecostal movements birthed in the early 20th from the same revival eventually split based on race and cultural pressure. So, when the white leaders of the AG washed the black feet of the COGIC in a spirit of repentance and confession, it was a wonderful day. Perhaps hospitality, more intentionally taught and practiced, will compel reconciliation in wider and more welcoming ways.

9. Food must be on the menu.

As mentioned, in my approach to this project I bit off more than I could chew. So decisions were made as to what to include and exclude in the project. It is now clear to me that any curriculum on divine hospitality and discipleship cannot be fully effectual without the discussion of and practice of food. Hospitality is inexorably combined with table fellowship. The concept of the meal covenant as understood in biblical stories like Abraham and Sarah, The Last Supper and Revelation's The Marriage Supper of the Lamb, are critical to understanding the disciple's own redemption and reconciliation. Meals are simply present in God's welcome. Church communion itself is a visible and meaningful act of God's hospitality.

The class would benefit from time spent teaching on the importance of food in the mission of God. It also could link the theoretical with the practical practice if the hospitality class concluded with a shared meal, especially a meal formatted as *The Last Supper as a Passover Meal*, which my wife and I have taught for years in other settings.

10. As a piece of the discipleship pie, hospitality works.

One final lesson I've learned is that when understood, hospitality has great potential to transform. It transforms the host. It transforms the guest. And it transforms the community. I am more convinced of this now than when I began this project. The participant's readiness to engage in hospitable ways and their comments and notes written to me since the class ended reveal a change of heart and a change of perspective. To that end, the project supported my thesis. To the ultimate end of practicing hospitality with strangers, that is a step beyond this project.

Suggestions for Further Studies:

At the conclusion of this journey I ended up with more questions than answers. How biblical hospitality is implemented into intentional discipleship processes leaves a lot of room for discussion. My suggestions for further studies come in the form of questions. They are not exhaustive but hopefully they will serve to stimulate reflection and birth more conversations for others who want to impact this world for Jesus Christ.

1. How does hospitality in the local church make room for introverts both as hosts and guests?
2. What does hospitality in the local Pentecostal church look like when it comes to the varying spiritual gifts and expressions?
3. How might a fuller appreciation of divine hospitality change the way social hospitality is practiced in individuals' homes?
4. How might hospitality change the architecture of the church facility?
5. What are the practical steps that a local church can make to become more hospitable to guests in regards to welcoming, announcements, worship, and preaching?
6. How might a corporate response to God's hospitality be different than an individual's response?
7. What constitutes a valid response to God's hospitable offer of salvation and how might a church respond to that response?
8. How might the concept of divine hospitality address the needs of those who believe that material prosperity is the benefit of a faithful life?
9. How might the practice of journaling cultivate awareness of strangers in order to create opportunities for welcome?

10. How would biblical hospitality impact a church divided along political lines?
11. What would be the spiritual benefit of introducing historical practices of Christian hospitality in a local church setting?
12. How might foot washing be expressed today in meaningful ways?
13. How may the concept of divine hospitality inform, define, and motivate people in a local church with regard to the efforts of reducing world hunger?
14. How might the concept of divine hospitality interact with environmental issues?
15. How might the concept of divine hospitality interact with women in leadership?
16. When is it appropriate for a local church to refuse hospitality to someone and when is it appropriate to welcome that individual back in?
17. How might an understanding of ‘guest in God’s Kingdom’ impact church members as to their behavior towards one another?
18. What does creating space for others look like in the marketplace, at school and in places of leisure?
19. How can churches on a limited budget effectively practice hospitality to families with autistic children?
20. How can a fuller appreciation of the arts be incorporated into the local faith community in meaningful and hospitable ways?

Conclusion

My hope has been that by exploring the implications of biblical hospitality and centering them with the discipleship process participants’ perspectives toward strangers will be transformed, and therefore, their actions more welcoming. In my attempt to introduce biblical hospitality to New Life Assembly, I have reflected on the uniqueness

of Christian hospitality and delved into its biblical and theological taproots. I have listened to a wide range of conversations from scholars and pastors who have leaned heavily into the subject. I have developed curriculum and engaged the material with a wonderful group of students. And, I have wrestled with and reflected upon the implications of this work. These are all things that I have done. But in the final analysis it is not about what I have done but rather what someone else has done. All Christian hospitality is a response to God's prior hospitality in and through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Christ offered me reconciliation and invited me to his table. He condescended to be my Host. Me, a sinner, first offered welcome. Ridiculous. The idea that God would be my host is outlandish. But it's outlandish grace. George Herbert captured the wonder of this gracious hospitality with beautiful and insight. May Herbert's vision be fully seen and practiced in the church:

*Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.
A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?
Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.*

George Herbert, *Love III*⁴

⁴ George Herbert, *The Works of George Herbert*, ed., E.F. Hutchinson, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941) 188-189.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: The Self-Survey

Name _____ Date _____ ID: _____

A. Circle 5 words that most come to mind when you hear the following words:

1. *Hospitality:*

Concierge	hassle	perception	house cleaning	friends
responsibility	coffee/tea	church	food	entertainment
neighbors	fun	money	commitment	discipleship
customer service	stranger	pamper	God	china (dishes)
anxious	criticism	impression	home	transformation
vacation	mission	love	salvation	justice

Other: _____

2. *Stranger:*

thriller (movie)	guest	threat	caution	avoid
security	different	friend	same	terrorism
outsider	me	them	curious	fun
anxious	unknown	invite	foreigner	friendly
opportunity	God	poor	mission	responsibility
Other: _____				

3. *Christian:*

stranger	guest	judge	home	host
disciple	obedient	hypocrite	political	conformer
accepting	loving	attentive	sacrificial	friendly
protective	cautious	suspicious	different	same
forgiving	righteous	herald	courageous	genuine

Other _____

B. Answer the following questions as they best describe you:

1. I try my best to live by the Bible's teaching.

- Totally true of me
- Mostly true of me
- Moderately true of me
- Somewhat true of me
- Not at all true of me

2. I desire to live like Jesus in all areas of my life.
 - Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
3. My home is where I get away from the world.
 - Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
4. During Sunday worship gatherings I seek out new people to get together with outside of church scheduled events.
 - Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
5. I believe hospitality is a salvation issue.
 - Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
6. I prefer to spend time with people like me.
 - Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
7. During Sunday church gatherings I don't really pay attention to people I don't already know.
 - Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
8. I believe that entertainment is central to effective hospitality.
 - Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me

- Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
9. I prefer church to be a “family” place where everyone knows one another.
- Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
10. As a follower of Jesus Christ I believe I am responsible for hosting others.
- Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
11. I can identify what makes Christian hospitality unique. In other words, I can tell others what makes Christian hospitality ‘Christian.’
- Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
12. I believe that if a church is a loving community it will not experience conflict.
- Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
13. I identify and empathize with strangers.
- Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me
14. I feel like I’ve hosted well if people complement me & seemed impressed.
- Totally true of me
 - Mostly true of me
 - Moderately true of me
 - Somewhat true of me
 - Not at all true of me

15. My home needs to be in order for me to invite guests over.

- Totally true of me
- Mostly true of me
- Moderately true of me
- Somewhat true of me
- Not at all true of me

Short answer:

Hospitality is central to the Christian faith because...

Scale of 1 to 10:

As of today, circle the number that reflects how likely are you to invest your life in hosting and helping guests and strangers:

Never!

Actively Doing it!

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Thank you for participating in this survey!

Appendix B

Survey Results – Section 1: Word Identification:

P1:

- | | | |
|----------------|-------|---|
| 1. Hospitality | Pre- | <i>fun, pamper, love, house cleaning, friends.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>anxious, stranger, church, love, God.</i> |
| 2. Stranger | Pre- | <i>outsider, anxious, unknown, caution, avoid.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>opportunity, guest, unknown, invite, friendly.</i> |
| 3. Christian | Pre- | <i>forgiving, loving, righteous, attentive, friendly.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>accepting, loving, host, attentive, friendly.</i> |

P2:

- | | | |
|----------------|-------|---|
| 1. Hospitality | Pre- | <i>love, food, God, home, friends.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>stranger, God, home, food, mission.</i> |
| 2. Stranger | Pre- | <i>outsider, guest, poor, foreigner.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>outsider, opportunity, poor, foreigner, mission.</i> |
| 3. Christian | Pre- | <i>disciple, accepting, forgiving, loving, genuine.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>accepting, forgiving, attentive, home, friendly.</i> |

P3:

- | | | |
|----------------|-------|--|
| 1. Hospitality | Pre- | <i>stranger, food, home, friends, entertainment.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>stranger, food, home, friends, love.</i> |
| 2. Stranger | Pre- | <i>opportunity, guest, invite, caution, curious.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>opportunity, friend, invite, caution, curious.</i> |
| 3. Christian | Pre- | <i>accepting, loving, different, friendly, genuine.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>accepting, forgiving, loving, sacrificial, different.</i> |

P4:

- | | | |
|----------------|-------|--|
| 1. Hospitality | Pre- | <i>anxious, coffee/tea, stranger, love, friends.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>responsibility, stranger, mission, love, salvation.</i> |
| 2. Stranger | Pre- | <i>security, opportunity, different, unknown, caution.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>God, friend, invite, caution, mission.</i> |
| 3. Christian | Pre- | <i>disciple, forgiving, loving, courageous, host.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>disciple, forgiving, loving, courageous, genuine.</i> |

P5:

- | | | |
|----------------|-------|--|
| 1. Hospitality | Pre- | <i>customer service, fun, impression, food, friends.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>coffee/tea, perception, impression, love, commitment.</i> |
| 2. Stranger | Pre- | <i>outsider, me, invite, caution, curious.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>opportunity, invite, curious, responsibility.</i> |
| 3. Christian | Pre- | <i>accepting, loving, hypocrite, courageous, same.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>accepting, loving, host, conformer, friendly.</i> |

P6:

- | | | |
|----------------|-------|--|
| 1. Hospitality | Pre- | <i>responsibility, anxious, hassle, cleaning, food.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>responsibility, mission, love, God, discipleship.</i> |
| 2. Stranger | Pre- | <i>outsider, unknown, caution, foreigner, friendly.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>outsider, guest, invite, mission, responsibility.</i> |
| 3. Christian | Pre- | <i>disciple, forgiving, obedient, loving, different.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>forgiving, loving, attentive, sacrificial, host.</i> |

P7:

- | | | |
|----------------|-------|---|
| 1. Hospitality | Pre- | <i>neighbors, church, commitment, God, salvation.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>responsibility, perception, love, God, discipleship.</i> |
| 2. Stranger | Pre- | <i>unknown.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>outsider, different.</i> |
| 3. Christian | Pre- | <i>obedient.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>forgiving, obedient, loving, sacrificial, host.</i> |

P8:

- | | | |
|----------------|-------|---|
| 1. Hospitality | Pre- | <i>fun, food, home, friends, entertainment.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>responsibility, perception, love, God, transformation.</i> |
| 2. Stranger | Pre- | <i>outsider, different, threat, them, caution.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>opportunity, guest, God, invite, responsibility.</i> |
| 3. Christian | Pre- | <i>protective, loving, cautious, judge, sacrificial.</i> |
| | Post- | <i>disciple, guest, loving, attentive, host.</i> |

Appendix C

Survey Results- Section 2: Multiple Choice

1. I try my best to live by the Bible's teaching.

P1:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P2:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P3:	Pre- totally true	Post- mostly true
P4:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P5:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P6:	Pre- moderately true	Post- mostly true
P7:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P8:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true

2. I desire to live like Jesus in all areas of my life.

P1:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P2:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P3:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P4:	Pre- mostly true	Post- totally true
P5:	Pre- moderately true	Post- mostly true
P6:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P7:	Pre- totally true	Post- totally true
P8:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true

3. My home is where I get away from the world.

P1:	Pre- totally true	Post- totally true
P2:	Pre- mostly true	Post- moderately true
P3:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P4:	Pre- moderately true	Post- somewhat true
P5:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P6:	Pre- totally true	Post- totally true
P7:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P8:	Pre- totally true	Post- mostly true

4. During Sunday worship gatherings I seek out new people to get together with outside of church scheduled events.

P1:	Pre- not at all true	Post- not at all true
P2:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P3:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P4:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true
P5:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true
P6:	Pre- not at all true	Post- not at all true
P7:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- not at all true
P8:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true

5. I believe hospitality is a salvation issue.

P1:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- moderately true
P2:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P3:	Pre- not at all true	Post- mostly true
P4:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- totally true
P5:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- mostly true
P6:	Pre- not at all true	Post- moderately true
P7:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P8:	Pre- not at all true	Post- moderately true

6. I prefer to spend time with people like myself.

P1:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P2:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P3:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- not at all true
P4:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P5:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P6:	Pre- mostly true	Post- moderately true
P7:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P8:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true

7. During Sunday church gatherings I don't really pay attention to people I don't already know.

P1:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P2:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- not at all true
P3:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- not at all true
P4:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- moderately true
P5:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- not at all true
P6:	Pre- moderately true	Post- somewhat true
P7:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P8:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true

8. I believe that entertainment is central to effective hospitality.

P1:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- mostly true
P2:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P3:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true
P4:	Pre- not at all true	Post- moderately true
P5:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P6:	Pre- not at all true	Post- not at all true
P7:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P8:	Pre- moderately true	Post- not at all true of me

9. I prefer church to be a “family” place where everyone knows one another.

P1:	Pre- moderately true	Post- mostly true
P2:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P3:	Pre- moderately true	Post- mostly true
P4:	Pre- totally true	Post- mostly true
P5:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P6:	Pre- mostly true	Post- somewhat true
P7:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true
P8:	Pre- not at all true	Post- moderately true

10. As a follower of Jesus Christ I believe I am responsible for hosting others.

P1:	Pre- moderately true	Post- totally true
P2:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P3:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P4:	Pre- totally true	Post- moderately true
P5:	Pre- moderately true	Post- mostly true
P6:	Pre- mostly true	Post- totally true
P7:	Pre- moderately true	Post- mostly true
P8:	Pre- not at all true	Post- mostly true

11. I can identify what makes Christian hospitality unique. In other words, I can tell others what makes Christian hospitality ‘Christian.’

P1:	Pre- not at all true	Post- moderately true
P2:	Pre- mostly true	Post- totally true
P3:	Pre- not at all true	Post- mostly true
P4:	Pre- mostly true	Post- moderately true
P5:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- mostly true
P6:	Pre- not at all true	Post- mostly true
P7:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true
P8:	Pre- not at all true	Post- mostly true

12. I believe that if a church is a loving community it will not experience conflict.

P1:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true
P2:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P3:	Pre- not at all true	Post- totally true
P4:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true
P5:	Pre- moderately true	Post- mostly true
P6:	Pre- not at all true	Post- not at all true
P7:	Pre- not at all true	Post- not at all true
P8:	Pre- not at all true	Post- not at all true

13. I identify and empathize with strangers.

P1:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- moderately true
P2:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P3:	Pre- mostly true	Post- totally true
P4:	Pre- mostly true	Post- moderately true
P5:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- moderately true
P6:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P7:	Pre- moderately true	Post- somewhat true
P8:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- moderately true

14. I feel like I've hosted well if people complement me & seemed impressed.

P1:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- moderately true
P2:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P3:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true
P4:	Pre- mostly true	Post- mostly true
P5:	Pre- not at all true	Post- not at all true
P6:	Pre- not at all true	Post- not at all true
P7:	Pre- somewhat true	Post- somewhat true
P8:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true

15. My home needs to be in order for me to invite guests over.

P1:	Pre- mostly true	Post- moderately true
P2:	Pre- moderately true	Post- somewhat true
P3:	Pre- moderately true	Post- moderately true
P4:	Pre- mostly true	Post- moderately true
P5:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true
P6:	Pre- totally true	Post- somewhat true
P7:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true
P8:	Pre- not at all true	Post- somewhat true

Appendix D

Survey Results- Section 3: Short Answer:

Hospitality is central to the Christian faith because...

P1:

- Pre- *Christianity is all about relationship.*
Post- *Being a follower of Christ is all about relationships.*

P2:

- Pre- *God is the ultimate host. How we host Him and how we host others reflects our hearts.*
Post- *It is our response to the Ultimate Host. How we host Him and others is critical.*

P3:

- Pre- *Hospitality is being a friend. Friendly. Open and giving of self.*
Post- *Hospitality means friendship. Jesus (among other things) is a friend to us and if I'm trying to live like him I must be a friend to others.*

P4:

- Pre- *It shows your love for others and is an example to others of love.*
Post- *It is the model that Christ gave us. God first loved us with his hospitality. As Christians we need to show the same to others.*

P5:

- Pre- *Shows love towards each other. I entertain not very often. Always am happy afterwards. Entertaining is hospitable.*
Post- *Shows a concern and feeling for others, opens the door for people to become Christians.*

P6:

- Pre- *By example of the Lord.*
Post- *It is required of me as a Christian but God is really the Host and I am the instrument which allows him this place to show Himself through my being hospitable.*

P7:

- Pre- *I believe you need to invite people, and help people, if you love God in your life.*
Post- *God command.*

P8:

- Pre- *You invite someone in, you provide for them, whether it's food or drink or conversation. You provide a welcoming safe place, just as Christ did for me.*
Post- *Christ accepted me as I was and am, so He is the example to follow.*

Appendix E

Survey Results- Section 4: State of Readiness Scale

As of today, circle the number that reflects how likely are be hospitable to strangers:

P1:

Pre-Survey: 4

Post-Survey: 8

P2:

Pre-Survey: 5

Post-Survey: 9

P3:

Pre-Survey: 8

Post-Survey: 9

P4:

Pre-Survey: 7

Post-Survey: 8

P5:

Pre-Survey: 5

Post-Survey: 8

P6:

Pre-Survey: 1

Post-Survey: 8

P7

Pre-Survey: 7

Post-Survey: 8

P8:

Pre-Survey: 7

Post-Survey: 9

Total numbers:

Pre-Survey: 44

Post-Survey: 67

Average participant's score:

Pre-Survey: 5.5

Post-Survey: 8.37

Percentage of Readiness Increase: 52.27%

Appendix F

Class Evaluations

1. Strengths of Class:

What parts of the class were the most helpful to you?

- *I like d the examples of OT and NT hospitality and once again seeing how central hospitality is to the gospel.*
- *Biblical perspective. Class interaction.*
- *Examples in the Bible of hospitality showed me how important it is.*
- *Helped me understand the real scope of hospitality.*
- *That Jesus was a host. Repeated in the Bible.*
- *Finding out what hospitality is about.*
- *Biblical foundation, building on it...Scripture references.*

What did you like the most?

- *I like some of the outside quotes and historical background. I loved how Jesus was guest and host.*
- *Class interaction. Bible stories.*
- *The challenge to see everyone as a person, not just part of a church, and that it is important to be friendly. To look at the other person, not my feelings of inferiority. "It's not about me!"*
- *Lectures were great. Discussion time was fun.*
- *Class talking and idea sharing.*
- *Changed my thinking from something done just for fun to becoming a servant more in the teaching given by Jesus.*
- *Finding out that hospitality is in God's image.*
- *Mentally being challenged to look for opportunities to be ready to be a host, not just in my home.*

2. Making the class better:

What parts of the class could be strengthened or changed?

- *? Need to think on these*
- *More time to look at the Bible closer and hear people's stories. We/I learn from others.*
- *More time to expand on this more. Longer class. For the teacher, a new remote!!!*
- *Would like it to be a longer class and more in depth.*
- *First class introductions and ice breaker.*
- *Nothing.*
- *More time in each section.*

What would you include in this class that wasn't included that would make it more effective?

- *Not sure, I learned a lot. I enjoyed it. I felt rushed. Yet I understand the time restraint.*
- *I'm not positive that we all need to do hospitality the same way. There are so many possibilities and needs that maybe, like using spiritual gifts, there are some areas of hospitality that fit better than others. We all need to be friendly though.*
- *I think that to have others explain how they feel when they are with strangers, how they break the ice; examples help.*
- *Seemed we had to rush. Appreciate the labors of your time and presentation of the background of Christian hospitality.*
- *More Bible readings of Scripture. Loved the biblical stories.*
- *I like it the way it was.*
- *Personalized planning – what works for me, what works for you. Create some specific goals for myself.*

3. Was the material challenging in forming your Christian life? Explain.

- *Yes, It challenged me to embrace hospitality in this season of my life. It has been a huge part of my prior life and restoring it as a widow with some uneasy limitations seems sort of daunting.*
- *I don't think so. Don't understand the question.*
- *Yes, it is easy for me to focus on me and mine, and not really seeing strangers more than superficially.*
- *Yes, helped me to know that I need to continue to open up to people and know that God will be with me to help me know what to say or do. He will show up.*
- *Brought the idea it doesn't have to be formal and Martha Stewart setting. Just be sincerer and willing. It is about God having opportunity through my efforts.*
- *Yes. To become more thoughtful of others and not so concerned with how hosting affects me.*
- *Yes, the (unknown word, can't make it out) came from the Bible or most of it.*
- *Yes, I never saw hospitality as foundation as it is.*

4. How would you describe the class experience in general?

- *Awesome.*
- *Great, I really enjoyed it. I would like to go through it again.*
- *It was hopefully life changing. I want to get to know people I don't currently know. I want to see the stranger.*
- *What an eye opening class. Thanks pastor, bless you!*
- *Love it! Thank you. Always a blessing.*
- *Very good!*
- *I think I learned a lot about hospitality.*
- *Good but I would like homework ☺. Actually I know hospitality is my homework but I still feel like I need to chew on the Word more.*

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VITA

Name: Kevin Allen Hall

Date and Place of Birth: January 4th, 1958, Portland, Oregon

Pastor: New Life Assembly, Kittitas, WA

Family: wife, Josie; daughters, Hannah, Emily, and Kaisa

Education

Bachelors of Arts: 1985 - Northwest College, Kirkland, Washington

Masters of Divinity, 2005 - Regent College, Vancouver, BC

Doctor of Ministry, 2015 (expected) - Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA

Special Interests:

Guitar

History

Photography

Sports